





## JOHN WATERS NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, NEW YORK

### JOHN KELSEY

In 1964, John Waters shot his first short film, *Hag in a Black Leather Jacket*, using shoplifted film stock and a Brownie 8 mm movie camera given to him by his grandmother for his seventeenth birthday. Thirty-three years later, while directing Edward Furlong and Christina Ricci in *Pecker*, he noticed that the tape marks his crew was using to position the actors on set looked a lot like abstract drawings, and decided to photograph and present them as art (*Mark #1–Mark #15*, 1998). Both *Hag* and the “Mark” series were included in “Change of Life,” Waters’s exhibition of photographic and sculptural work, curated by New Museum director Lisa Phillips and independent curator and critic Marvin Heiferman for the New Museum of Contemporary Art. But the most remarkable discovery here was what Waters calls his “little movies”—sequences of up to twenty-four still images, framed and legible from left to right like storyboards or image-sentences. First exhibited at Colin de Land’s American Fine Arts gallery in the mid-’90s and steadily evolving ever since, this body of work could be said to constitute a new, static, and silent kind of

a large part in the exhibition—the viewer suddenly collided with razor-sharp little blockbusters *Grace Kelly’s Elbows*, 1998, and *Lana Backwards*, 1994. These borderline photo-films are the results of his obsessive practice of snapping still frames off the screen while watching and rewatching his own and other directors’ movies on video. If such low-tech images seem to nod to the art of “antiphotographers” Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine, Waters’s spin on rephotography eschews these artists’ coolly critical flirtations with the “death of the author” to announce something even more exciting: the death of the audience. Each sequence of stills is a subtly terroristic act of cinema and a joyful subversion of spectatorship, perpetrated with the simplest and most available means: a videotape, a TV, and an ordinary still camera. As Waters subjects well-known and obscure Hollywood films and their stars to the adoring violence of his decontextualizations and juxtapositions—freezing, cropping, speeding up, recasting, and reorganizing cinema in the ultimate director’s cut—he rediscovers authorship in the lowly depths of fandom and consumption, unleashing a relentless, libidinalized spectator-director.

*Puke in the Cinema*, 1998; *Retard*, 2000; and *Movie Star Junkie*, 1997, match-cut frames from a variety of films according to abject subject matter, generating crude and plotless star-studded epics. In fetish objects like *Sophia Loren Decapitated*, 1998, and *Farrah*, 2000—two sequences of X-Acto-knifed close-ups—Waters stalks and slashes

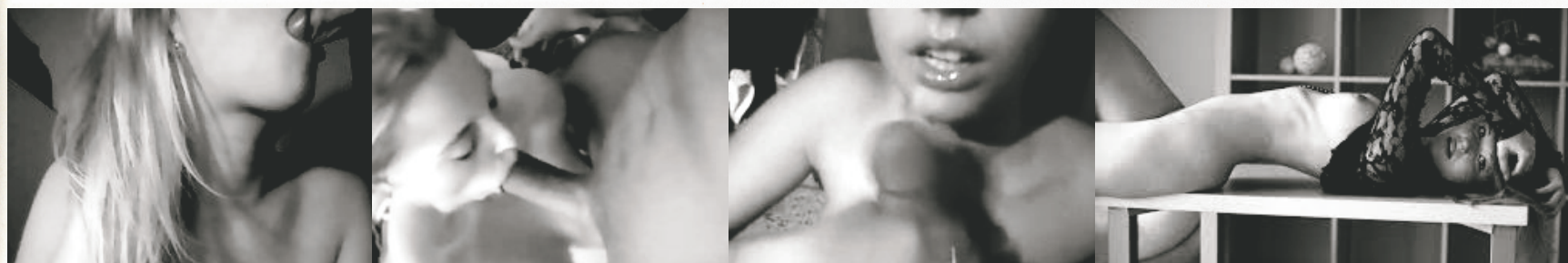


Opposite page: John Waters, *Return to Sender*, 2003, color photograph, 30 x 14". This page, above: John Waters, *Mark #12*, 1998, color photograph, 14 x 19 1/2". From the series "Mark #1–Mark #15," 1998. Below: John Waters, *Farrah* (detail), 2000, 8 color photographs with cut-outs, 9 1/2 x 8 1/2".

provocative of his little movies are those that gravitate toward the glitches, grain, and body of the degraded, reformatted film-to-tape image, excavating minor, even subliminal events like hairs in the gate, video lines, academy leader, etc. These material moments become the new stars of his drastic reedits, as do actresses’ elbows, insignificant details of costume, and credit sequences. *Ten Change-Over Marks*, 2003, isolates and enlarges the scratchy little circles that flash in the corner of film frames

stars and glamorous losers, Waters is drawn to the little deaths and breakdowns that happen in cinema; he pulls films from the grave and makes us notice their decomposed beauty.

Waters’s little movies are subversive rewritings of cinematic material liberated from its mise-en-scène so that it can tell its own story in its own time. By tearing cinema from the constraint of filmic time in this way, Waters causes the “veritable mutation of reading and its object, text or film”



moviemaking, one based on captured and edited fragments. More than debating how this activity relates to a recent history of art photography, we should ask instead what kind of cinema is being made here.

At the New Museum, after passing a framed grid of the scribbled-out, Twombly-esque index cards that Waters uses to organize his daily life (*308 Days*, 2003) as well as a photograph of the returned mail he’d addressed to various deceased, jailed, or relocated celebrities (*Return to Sender*, 2003)—this kind of anecdotal, autobiographical riff on the readymade also played

movie stars known for their impeccably controlled self-images. *Manson Copies Richard Gere*, 2000, is a concisely told two-frame makeover saga, while *Wicked Glinda*, 2003—a single still snapped at the precise moment *The Wizard of Oz* dissolves from the Good Witch to the Wicked Witch of the West—is the psychedelic debut of a dreamy new screen heroine.

Waters wields his VCR and his camera like a demented studio boss, reclaiming productions from their directors long after they’ve already been released, if not abandoned to history’s dustbins. The most

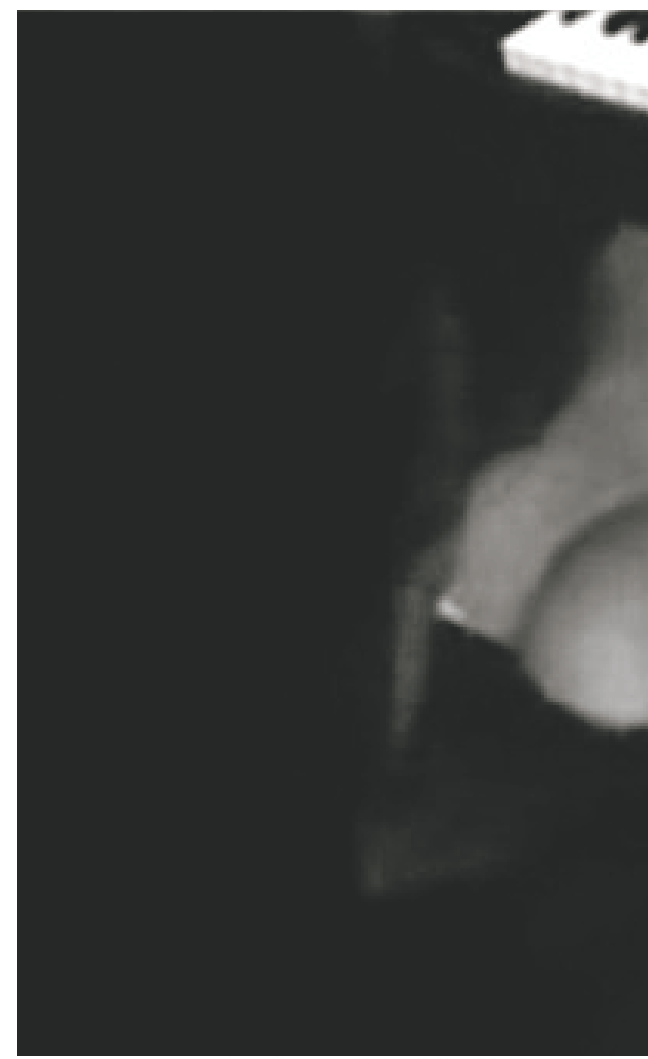
to cue the projectionist for reel changes. Echoing *Twelve Assholes* and *a Dirty Foot*, 1996—a sequence of raunchy porn stills displayed behind a drawn velvet curtain—these signals suddenly resemble celluloid anuses (there are plenty of other cases where Waters eroticizes the very material and mechanisms of cinematic production and distribution). *Despair*, 1995, groups melancholy instances of the film credit “Directed by Alan Smithee,” which ends up on botched Hollywood films whose real directors prefer to remain anonymous. In the same way that he’s fascinated by faded

that Roland Barthes proposed in his essay on Eisenstein’s film stills, “The Third Meaning.” In his photographic work, Waters activates movie desires that can’t be directly satisfied by making films in the normal, professional sense. It is filmmaking that luxuriates in a freedom from budgets, producers, and crew. Alone with only images, directing without company, conversation, or compromise, Waters comes closer to the perfect movie, the potential one he vaguely remembers or hallucinates in its fragments. □

John Kelsey is a New York-based writer and a member of the artists’ collective Bernadette Corporation.

## Art of the P

FULVIA CARNEVALE AND JOHN KELSEY IN CO



Chris Marker, untitled (Paris, April 2006), black-and-white digital image, dimensions variable.

The Young Girl’s pacific nature caught my attention at a reading group cloistered in its enthusiasm for the hackneyed ‘becoming.’ A breeze wafted between the columns of contemporary isolation, and I found that by focussing on her pillowy cheeks I could augment an erection, enflame it even, in the feckless seesawing motions of the multitude as they tranced out to interpretation.

In *Pornografia* Witold Gombrowicz has the narrator muse that, “All situations in the world are figures,” as he witnesses two youth’s perform a vacuous intimacy. He dignifies his imaginary sense of injustice by using a boy who he’s chosen to be an interloper in the couples romance, and bring him into dialogue with the deeper meanings of his surroundings. Written 23 years after *Ferdydurke*, Gombrowicz’s later novel disavows his earlier ironic distance to immaturity. Preferring the bowels to the mask, he “*fabricates secretly... a world made out of the refuse of a higher world of culture, a domain of trash... inadmissible passions... a secondary domain of compensation.*” That is to say pornography.



# ossible

CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES RANCIÈRE



ble. From the series "The Revenge of the Eye," 2006.

**FULVIA CARNEVALE:** Your work has taken a very particular trajectory. It starts with archival research on workers' struggles and the utopias of the nineteenth century and ends up in the field of contemporary art, aesthetics, and cinema. Do you see ruptures or continuity on your philosophical path?

**JACQUES RANCIÈRE:** I'm not a philosopher who has gone from politics to aesthetics, from liberation movements of the past to contemporary art. I have always sought to contest globalizing thought that relies on the presupposition of a historical necessity. In the 1970s I conducted research in early-nineteenth-century workers' archives\* because the May '68 movement had highlighted the gap between Marxist theory and the complex history of the actual forms of workers' emancipation. I did it to counter the return to Marxist dogmatism on the one hand and, on the other, the liquidation of the very thought of workers' emancipation in the guise of a critique of Marxism. Later I weighed in on questions of contemporary art, because the interpretation of twentieth-century art movements also found itself implicated in this manipulation of history. Contemporary art was taken hostage in the operation of the "end of utopias," caught between so-called postmodern discourse, which proclaimed the "end of grand narratives," and the reversal of modernism itself, as modernist thinkers ended up polemicizing against modernism, ultimately condemning emancipatory art's utopias and their contribution to totalitarianism. It's always the same process: using defined periods and great historical ruptures to impose interdictions. Against this, my work has been the same, whether dealing with labor's past or art's present: to break down the great divisions—science and ideology, high culture and popular culture, representation and the unrepresentable, the modern and the postmodern, etc.—to contrast so-called historical necessity with a topography of the configuration of possibilities, a perception of the multiple alterations and displacements

that make up forms of political subjectivization and artistic invention. So I reexamined the dividing lines between the modern and postmodern, demonstrating, for example, that "abstract painting" was invented not as a manifestation of art's autonomy but in the context of a way of thinking of art as a fabricator of forms of life, that the intermingling of high art and popular culture was not a discovery of the 1960s but at the heart of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Nevertheless, what interests me more than politics or art is the way the boundaries defining certain practices as artistic or political are drawn and redrawn. This frees artistic and political creativity from the yoke of the great historical schemata that announce the great revolutions to come or that mourn the great revolutions past only to impose their proscriptions and their declarations of powerlessness on the present.

**CARNEVALE:** Has your work been received differently by the philosophical public, as it were, than by the contemporary art audience?

**RANCIÈRE:** Personally, I don't speak for philosophers. I don't speak for the members of a particular body or discipline. I write to shatter the boundaries that separate specialists—of philosophy, art, social sciences, etc. I write for those who are also trying to tear down the walls between specialties and competences. This was the case with certain philosophers in the '60s and '70s, but it isn't the case today, and it is generally not what academia promotes. On the other hand, the contemporary art world may be more receptive, because contemporary art is, quintessentially, art defined by the erasure of medium specificity, indeed by the erasure of the visibility of art as a distinct practice. So what I have tried to theorize, under the name of the aesthetic regime of art, is the general form of this paradox wherein art was defined and institutionalized as a sphere of common experience at the very moment that the boundaries between what is and isn't art were being erased. Moreover, if my work has garnered special interest in contemporary art, it may be because I have tried to create a little breathing room with respect to the established divisions between modernity, the end of modernity, postmodernity, and so on. By complicating those relationships, by reestablishing an element of indeterminacy in the relationship between artistic production and political subjectivization, I have tried to free artists, curators, and other actors implicated in this world from the atmosphere of guilt wrought by the historical mission of art—a mission at which it would necessarily fail—or, alternatively, from a utopia of art that would have led to totalitarianism.

**JOHN KELSEY:** And was your idea of "equality"—the notion of the equality of intelligences that you put forward in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* [Le

#Zukofsky #Poem beginning "The" #The Public School  
#CAGE83 #Deleuze #Guattari #Mille Plateaux #becoming  
#rake #Pornografia #Tselem #Witold Gombrowicz  
#Ferdydurke #Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the  
Young-Girl #Claire Fontaine #Fuvia Carneval #Tiqqun  
#Julien Coupat #break-up #non-consensual publicity  
#narrative thread





This page: Jeremy Deller, *Battle of Orgreave*, 2001. Performance view, Orgreave, England, 2001. Opposite page, from top: Josephine Meckseper, *Aviso*, 2006, aluminum, mirror, Plexiglas, lights, glassware, scouring pad, glass ball, feather duster, metal stand, plastic frame, paper, lace, *Aviso* sign, jewelry, and acrylic painted hand sculpture, 89 x 46 x 18". Jean-Luc Moulène, *Objets de grève, la poêle des 17 de Manufrance*, 1999–2000, color photograph, 14 1/8 x 18 1/2".

*Maître ignorant* (1987)]—a means of moving between early modern revolutionary discourses and the open question of subjective emancipation through contemporary art practices today?

**RANCIÈRE:** The very idea of Art—of the aesthetic experience—as defining a specific sphere of experience was born in the late eighteenth century under the banner of equality: the equality of all subjects, the definition of a form of judgment freed from the hierarchies of knowledge and those of social life. This equality that Kant, Schiller, and Hegel spoke of is neither equality in a general sense nor the equality of revolutionary movements. It is a certain sort of equality, a certain form of the neutralization of hierarchies that in other respects govern sensible existence. This aesthetic equality mingled with or confronted others. The idea of the equality of intelligences—which I borrowed from Joseph Jacotot, an early-nineteenth-century university professor whose largely forgotten educational philosophy inspired *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*—is a criterion that allows us to test the various thoughts and practices that lay claim to equality. It is clear, from this point of view, that art in and of itself is not liberating; it either is or isn't depending on the type of capacity it sets in motion, on the extent to which its nature is shareable or universalizable. For example, emancipation can't be expected from forms of art that presuppose the imbecility of the viewer while anticipating their precise effect on that viewer: for example, exhibitions

that capitalize on the denunciation of the "society of the spectacle" or of "consumer society"—bugbears that have already been denounced a hundred times—or those that want to make viewers "active" at all costs with the help of various gadgets borrowed from advertising, a desire predicated on the presupposition that the spectator is otherwise necessarily rendered "passive" solely by virtue of his looking. An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world, when, in other words, it stops *wanting* to emancipate us.

**CARNEVALE:** Let's return to the question of aesthetics and politics, terms paired with increasing frequency of late and with which your work is so closely associated. How did this odd couple become so fashionable?

**RANCIÈRE:** It's not a question of fashion. It represents a shift in the traditional formulation of the relationship between art and politics. In the time of politically engaged art, when critical models were clearly agreed upon, we took art and politics as two well-defined things, each in its own corner. But at the same time, we presupposed a trouble-free passage between an artistic mode of presentation and the determination to act; that is, we believed that the "raised consciousness" engendered by art—by the strangeness of an artistic form—would provoke political action. The artist

who presented the hidden contradictions of capitalism would mobilize minds and bodies for the struggle. The deduction was unsound, but that didn't matter so long as the explanatory schemata and the actual social movements were strong enough to anticipate its effects. That is no longer the case today. And the passage to the pairing of "aesthetics and politics" is a way of taking this into account: We no longer think of art as one independent sphere and politics as another, necessitating a privileged mediation between the two—a "critical awakening" or "raised consciousness." Instead, an artistic intervention can be political by modifying the visible, the ways of perceiving it and expressing it, of experiencing it as tolerable or intolerable. The effect of this modification is consequent on its articulation with other modifications in the fabric of the sensible. That's what "aesthetics" means: A work of art is defined as such by belonging to a certain regime of identification, a certain distribution of the visible, the sayable, and the possible. Politics, meanwhile, has an aesthetic dimension: It is a common landscape of the given and the possible, a changing landscape and not a series of acts that are the consequence of "forms of consciousness" acquired elsewhere. "Aesthetics" designates this interface. But this interface also signifies the loss of any relationship of cause and effect between "representations" considered artistic and "engagements" considered political. At the heart of what I call the aesthetic regime of art is the loss of any determinate relationship between a work and its audience, between its sensible presence and an effect that will be its natural end. Now we must examine the very terrain of the sensible on which artistic gestures shake up our modes of perception and on which political gestures redefine our capacities for action. I am neither a historian of art nor a philosopher of politics, but I work on this question: What landscape can one describe as the meeting place between artistic practice and political practice?

**CARNEVALE:** We have a diagnosis you might not agree with: As soon as there are political subjects that disappear from the field of actual politics, that become obsolete through a number of historical processes, they are recuperated in iconic form in contemporary art. Many contemporary artists and curators seem to share, for example, a certain nostalgia for the countercultures of earlier generations. We are thinking of all the things centered around the labor movement, for instance, not only in the work of Jeremy Deller but also in that of plenty of other artists who use this sort of iconic code—Rirkrit Tiravanija, Sam Durant, Paul Chan. How do you explain this process? Is it a delayed reaction of contemporary art in relation to the present or is it a form of absorption?

**RANCIÈRE:** We have to go to the relationship between past and present. Your question presupposes that the present is what has disappeared, that we are nostalgic or in terms of nostalgia might reply that this is a dominant imagery of the present. More, the reexamination of the construction of the present, whether by reconstruction of the Thatcher era, Jeremy Deller's relation to the dominant imagery, there would otherwise be no reason for the occasional art which is complicit with the dominant imagery. A glance at the counterculture covers two problems: first, the militant culture of the year is necessarily nostalgic. It is, of Sam Durant, for example, the work of Josephine Meckseper, protest culture as a form of the relationship to popular culture to be the object of a new Pop art and the Nouveaux populaires "bad taste" to deconstruct Martin Parr's photograph tradition. But there is a movement to give form to a continuity and the forms of creativity and behaviors that testify to even our inherent powers of resistance. Luc Moulène's photograph [Strike Objects, 1999–2000] *Menschen Dinge* [The Human Things] (The Human Things, 2005) created at the Bucharest Esther Shalev-Gerz around the refashioned by detainees of the examples—examples that speak too well. In any case, this culture or to counterculture of the capacities they set in motion images they convey seems to be a cultural issue of the present.

**KELSEY:** Or maybe contemporary scene now. We could argue to promote the belief that certain are now obsolete. But in contemporary artists open constitution of our world? to mind?

**RANCIÈRE:** I would rather talk of resistance. Dissensus is a movement of the sensible, a space replaces another. Sophie R.

Interning for an online arts and literature magazine, le dernier cri with middle-management and tablet gazing illuminati, the girl wonders if she hangs together suitably. This not being her first foray into personal display she intuitively affirms (to work for) the stream of horizontal information that defines her non-paying employer's value demands donning an existential freshness. As well the next series of intrigues: a new job, lover, town, extracurricular activity.

She is a seductive mix of naive certainty, spherical contemplation, and wit. A timeless figure whose grace parcels out a high currency to that which she deems consumption worthy. Hatched from the century of the self she's in the black lodge of *Renn Fayre*, the child of bourgeois moderation, receiving marching orders to find herself in the fragments of her immediate surroundings.

An affaire will certainly entail a descent into a land spacious with magazine covers and referentiality. A recurrent and rich hell where fantasies of her identity will haunt my attention.



beyond too simple a rela-  
present, reality and icon.  
ses a certain idea of the  
ea that the working class  
can therefore speak of it  
of kitsch imagery. Artists  
ision borrowed from the  
noment and that, further-  
of the past is part of the  
nt. The question then is  
ting a strike from the  
er is proposing a break in  
magery of a world where  
nothing but high-tech vir-  
nused glance at the past,  
is vision. The retrospec-  
culture of the past in fact  
t, the relationship to the  
rs of revolt, which is not  
rather, acidic in the work  
le, to say nothing of the  
eper, who tries to show  
of youth fashion. Second,  
culture, which seems to  
w mutation. In the era of  
Réalistes, we gladly used  
stabilize “high culture.”  
s of kitsch follow in this  
re positive attempt today  
between artistic creativity  
anifested in objects and  
ryone’s capacities and to  
istance. Works like Jean-  
nic series *Objets de grève*  
2000] or the installation  
man Aspect of Objects,  
henwald Memorial by  
objects repurposed and  
of the camp are just two  
uit my argument perhaps  
ay of relating to popular  
es from the point of view  
in motion and not the  
ome to be the real politi-



**I am neither a historian  
of art nor a philosopher  
of politics, but I work  
on this question: What  
landscape can one  
describe as the meeting  
place between artistic  
and political practice?**



MARCH 2007 259

emporary art is the official  
that many artists today  
tain modes of resistance  
what ways do you see  
ning this question of the  
Do any examples come

alk about dissensus than  
odification of the coordi-  
ctacle or a tonality that  
istelhueber photographs

# The Mollusk of Reference

JOHN KELSEY ON “ROGER AND OUT”

**THAT SCHOOL FOR HER WAS THE LOCAL BOOKSTORE** and bartending in a city without an academy, serving people like Martin Kippenberger and Rosemarie Trockel, may be one reason why Cosima von Bonin is so singularly attuned to the dynamics by which artists emerge and become recognized as actors in their field. As the story goes, her own career begins with the moment she suddenly insists that her friends and customers in Cologne thenceforth refer to her as “the artist” Cosima von Bonin. Ever since, her practice has been an elaboration of the notion that the artist is information transmitted and received. All her themes—the self-historicizing of a community that both includes and excludes, indoctrination and discipline, role-playing and rank, the performance of success and failure, etc.—announce artistic production as a tactical, performative engagement with a given set of power relations. Some say that what keeps von Bonin’s story interesting is precisely the fact that she is not and never has been a real artist, so every move she makes risks betraying her original (creative) imposture. Others admit that she intimidates them with the Brandoesque power of her act, and that it’s too late now to call her out without risking one’s own credibility too.

In any case, with her retrospective “Roger and Out” having recently opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles—at this midcareer moment, that is, in von Bonin’s mythic trajectory—it seems obvious that we aren’t bored yet. If now is the time of survey and summary, of piling up the loot in the museum’s main gallery and making it official, there is nevertheless still the feeling of a gamble being made, on the part of both the artist and the institution and dealers who represent her. Will this attempt to make her work legible in America come at the price of neutralizing the dialogical play insiders have always loved in von Bonin’s work? Will Cologne open up or clam up in Los Angeles? “Roger and Out” both confirms and ends the conversation, acknowledging a message received and signing off in the same breath. The receiver of this brief transmission, whether a friend or a faceless ticket buyer, picks up the double message of communication and its interruption, and somehow it sounds like competence.

In the catalogue for the show, texts by MoCA curators Ann Goldstein (who organized the exhibition) and Bennett Simpson and by critics Isabelle Graw and Manfred Hermes recount how von Bonin emerged within the postmanly,



replacing the name *Klapheck* with *Krebber*, and leaving the rest as she found it, von Bonin performs authorship as a nearly imperceptible act of trespassing on the domain of others. And if naming is the job of men, then renaming is the more devious and resistant function by which this nonartist enters occupied territory, freeing up some space for her own movement. While everything about the image is up and down—the bold verticality of the model’s stance serving as a support for the list of men that extends down into her unzipped jeans—von Bonin’s gesture is cunningly horizontal. And this is how she arrives as an artist:

postpainterly context of early-1990s Cologne, specifically in relation to the contentious clique of neo-Conceptualists and institutional critics attached to Galerie Christian Nagel. Tales and details of the artist’s early collaborations with Kai Althoff, Josef Strau, and many others, of how her projects intersected with the fiercely collective ethic of the artist-run space Friesenwall 120 and with the upstart feminism of the journal *Eau de Cologne*, of her wily navigations of tricky art-couple dynamics (she has been married to Michael Krebber since 1992), and of all the various ways she has shown up as an artist without exactly being one, and risked making art of *that*, both historicize and mythologize the artist in Cologne in Los Angeles. This is because the local history that includes von Bonin is also the story of an art world performing itself with a vengeance, and because of the extent to which her works remain embedded in a collective reappropriation of context via the ruses of fiction. Some art can’t simply be shown or described—it must be scripted and followed, especially when the artist’s primary material is the social field in which she continually repositions herself. In this case, to curate is to map tactical moves in relation to both materials and people, and to install is to fabulate. To consume von Bonin in a museum is to engage something unavoidably legendary in her practice.

At MoCA, a narrow corridor leads us through scrappy traces of early von Bonin, presenting examples of a practice readable mostly in the gaps. *Untitled (Krebber über Krebber)*, 1990, is a black-and-white photograph of a topless woman with long hair and dark glasses whose bare white skin has been inscribed with an all-male roster of avant-garde brand names (Duchamp, Picabia, Schwitters . . .). It’s based on an appropriated *Flash Art* ad from the ’70s. Subtly altering this source image by

#Triple Canopy #unpaid internship #The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies #The Salaried Masses Duty and Distraction #Siegfried Kracauer #The Century of the Self #Adam Curtis #ecstasy #oblivion #Renn Faryre #playground #Reed #college traditions #Felix Bernstein\* #Choice, neoliberal #libertarian feminism #intersectionality bullies #Tiger Beatdown #Flavia Dzodan #katabasis

\*Certain LaGuardia (the popular nyc art high school) students commit themselves to a subversive ideal of art that involves a sparkling social life at large upper west side apartments and using a ton of drugs when mom and dad are out. A girl for instance took a shit in the dishwasher. Then later died of an overdose in her 20s. Had she survived, this memory would be the thrilling secret she would chalk up to the romance of adolescence or the mind altering effects of drugs. After the party ends, any commitment to art is lost and there is either death or a conformity to middle brow “grown up” values. Or if they wish to remain true to their pipe dreams, they endorse Liberal values—such as marijuana reform, women’s rights, and gay marriage. All of which involve the trading up of identities (the drug abuser becomes the neurotic anxious patient; the woman gets the privilege/power of the man, the sodomite becomes the nuclear father). In all these trade ups they strive to reach an ideal like that of the shit in the dishwasher—a subversion that remains within the comfort of the middle class living room of mom and dad (that will be discussable on msnbc, even if it -raises eyebrows-).

336 ARTFORUM



laterally, by means of a sliding and displacement.

Another instance of appropriation and naming, and another play on verticality and inclusion, *Installation Münzstrasse Hamburg*, 1990/2007, revisits von Bonin's very first "solo" exhibition, a collaboration with Strau. For this work, initially shown at Ausstellungsraum Münzstrasse 10 in Hamburg, Strau and von Bonin took as their primary material a list of the artists included in Harald Szeemann's 1969 exhibition "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form," but revised it by adding some contemporaries—Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Kippenberger, et al. They then printed the name of each artist, along with the years of his or her birth and first solo exhibition, on a helium balloon. The work reconstructs and elevates a community of artists, floating the names of others up to a horizontal wooden grid where the thirty-two multicolored balloons are finally caught and immobilized as a sort of hanging garden.



shopping bag or adds designer Martin Margiela's signature X stitch to a composition. This X even recurs on the back of the exhibition catalogue, putting the book itself and all its contents under the sign of couture. At once folksy and luxurious, DIY and gallery-friendly, von Bonin's expensive rags extend a territory where art and fashion immediately abandon their difference. And this isn't merely a

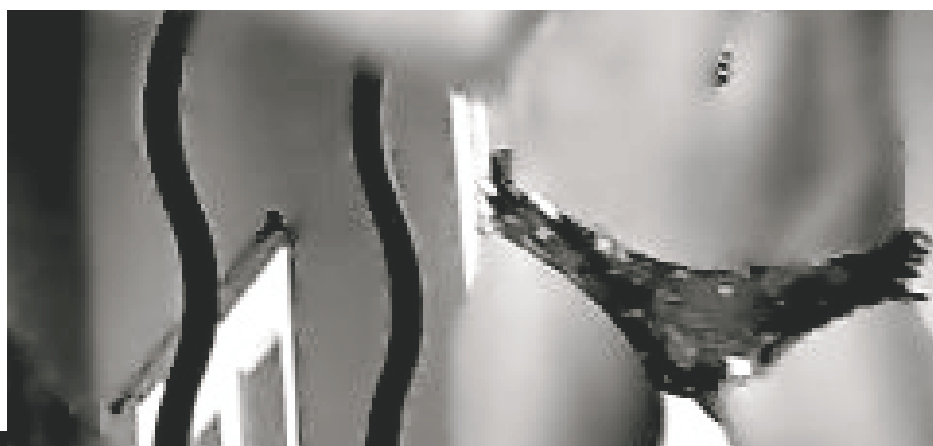
hand-stitched with figures and texts—have been her signature product. Dominating the MOCA catalogue, where virtually her entire *lappen* output is represented, these works recall both Sigmar Polke's famous use of mass-produced textiles as supports for paintings and Mike Kelley's hand-crafted banners, not to mention Sergej Jensen's recent "paintings" made of found fabrics. In von Bonin's case, the materials she chooses often come precharged with contemporary lifestyle signifiers, either because the prints are identifiable as Laura Ashley or Marks & Spencer, or because here and there she appropriates an Yves Saint Laurent

#### Von Bonin's post-'90s work anticipates the professional artist's return as full-time manager of her own brand-image.

Von Bonin's first and only appearance at American Fine Arts, New York, in 1993, is represented in the MOCA show by a series of crude drawings of prison windows—another collaboration, this one between artist-dealer Colin de Land and a caged parakeet. These lo-fi works, which consist of chalk and bird droppings on cardboard, did not greet viewers en masse at the AFA opening but were completed one at a time, by dealer and bird, over the course of the show. So we have, on the one hand, the disciplinary functions of lists, grids, and cages, and on the other, the possibility of meandering and sideways movements, and a systematic horizontality that occurs not only formally but in all the ways the artist displaces authorship across a social field that now includes animals.

At the end of the '90s, the performative aspects of von Bonin's work begin to reflect a general expansion and speeding up of the international art market. Like everything else, the artist goes global, and the recurrence of fashion signifiers in her practice mirrors the way artists are circulated as values within the sprawling noncontext of Chelsea and Art Basel. In her catalogue text for "Roger and Out," Graw describes von Bonin's shift from ephemeral and intensely collaborative projects to the kind of object-production befitting an international art star both as a decided "capitulation" to market forces and, paradoxically, as a devious "outperforming" of the market's demands. Since 2000, and right up through her "major" Chelsea shows at Friedrich Petzel Gallery in 2003 and 2006 and at Documenta 12, von Bonin's large-scale "*lappen*" (rags)—paintinglike compositions of readymade textiles

Opposite page: Cosima von Bonin, *Untitled (Krepper über Krepper)*, 1990, black-and-white photograph, 37 1/2 x 13 1/2". This page, from top: Cosima von Bonin and Josef Strau, *Installation Münzstrasse Hamburg*, 1990/2007, balloons and ink. Installation view, Ausstellungsraum Münzstrasse 10, Hamburg, 1990. View of Cosima von Bonin, "Roger and Out," 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest.



utopias in the form of, for example, the computer-assisted virus of Koolhaas-Mau-Prada). If von Bonin is now "outperforming" the absorption of her world by market forces, it is not only through her many references to lifestyle consumption but in the way her elaboration of a signature style becomes an actual styling and making-over of the museum itself. Standing guard in the galleries, one of many possible stand-ins for the artist is *Untitled (The Grey Bulldog with Box & Aprons)*, 2006, sitting blank and sphinxlike atop a closed wooden box. We're not sure whether it wants to be hugged or left alone.

An extremely deluxe-looking object that has been making recent appearances (in other versions) at galleries and art fairs is *Decoy (Der Krake #3)*, 2007. She is a large, soft octopus sewn from colorful Japanese sailcloth, with delicate, glinting glass-tipped tentacles. Known for her intelligence and inky escapes and for the fact that she decorates her own home, the octopus suggests a number of things about the conditions under which she now appears: the sticky clutches of capital, the shape-shifting and multitasking of the contemporary artist, the subject's strangeness to itself as it trades places with the commodity . . . or perhaps she is what the poet Paul Valéry once called the "all-powerful Mollusk of Reference." Here and elsewhere, the octopus remains camouflaged in her bright colors and seems to recoil from explication. She is a must-have, delicately sprawled on a white plinth amid an installation of very hard, severe new sculptures in white powder-coated steel, including *McD Gate*, 2007, a bright, blank, inverted L, self-illuminated by three fluorescent tubes. As cool as a Cady Noland and taller



Opposite page: Cosima von Bonin, *Kapitulation*, 2004, n. Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. This page, from top: View of Cosima von Bonin, "Roger and Out," 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Foreground: *Decoy (Der Krake #3)*, 2007, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest.

#### Even though the collective and critical ethic of '90s Cologne is now show, part music video, and part training camp—it persists

than the average gallerygoer, this sculpture shares qualities with the bland efficiency of drive-through architecture, high-security prisons, and Minimalist design, and is joined by others in a similar vein, including *Off Minor (Balcony & Tires)*, 2007, a wall-mounted condo-style balcony that holds two readymade race car tires behind its white, jail-like rails, and *Reference Hell #1 (YSL Fauteuil)*, 2007, a chair, also wall-mounted (but too high for sitting), fitted with two stacked cowhide cushions. Sculptures based on fences, classroom furniture, "traps," and other disciplinary devices fold von Bonin's ongoing practice of quoting high-end lifestyle culture back into Kafkaesque images of enclosure and biopolitical control. Fashion, at the end of the day, is not just about looking good. Contemporary design unleashes a fear-inflected monoculture that extends from cashmere sweaters to the structural invisibility of government interrogation rooms, each somehow implying the other. Von Bonin's new work not only suggests the artist's complicity in design's job of dressing up violence, it hijacks the museum as site of pedagogical



Inviting a passionate obsession I'd peruse the young girl's photos on Facebook until they became a reservoir of familiar scenes. Clicking through I'd invest these captured moments with a panoply of libidinous significance. She is among her friends posing in slips at a clearing in a forest, a close-up of trousers with a DIY patch, she was in a photo booth, on a junk raft, genuinely shocked at a party, sitting on gravel with arms wrapped around her legs pensively remote in a crowd of peers. With the acuity with which wasps build nests with tree dust and saliva, I was constructing paper-thin walls out of the reflection of her image. *Les miroirs sont les portes par lesquelles la Mort va et vient*. And our visits together were mounting in intensity and frequency.





mixed media, 35" 1 1/2" x 27" 2 1/4" x 14" 1 1/2".  
Los Angeles, 2007. Photo: Brian Forrest.  
and Out," 2007, Museum of Contemporary  
3), 2007. Photo: Brian Forrest. View of  
of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. From  
Decoy #1), 2007. Photo: Brian Forrest.

tweed-covered catamaran and its pilot—a soft Jar Jar Binks figure, also covered in tweed. The video involves von Bonin's longtime collaborators Dirk von Lowtzow and Thies Mynther (of the electropop group Phantom/Ghost), Anne Quirnbach (who also designed the catalogue for "Roger and Out"), and the artist's dogs Lord Jim and Boy George, and many others on camera and off. Tactically collaborative, the video choreographs fashion-styled bodies to music performed by von Lowtzow and Mynther, both wearing plastic dog masks. Actors enter and exit, work and pose, write on the walls, and finally destroy the sailboat's pontoons. Like the twin hull of the catamaran and the set's divided rooms, the "two positions" in the work's title might signal von Bonin's

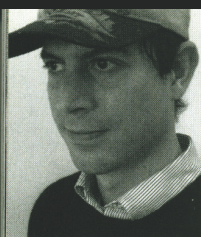
performed as an ironically romanticized ritual—part fashion show, part acting out the hope of surviving its own perversion.

ategically ambivalent relationship to the programmed trajectory of an artist's career. She is still part nonartist. And even though the collective and critical acclaim of '90s Cologne is now performed as an ironically romanticized and melancholic ritual—part fashion show, part music video, and part training camp—persists nonetheless, acting out the hope of surviving its own perversion in the present. Is this another way of saying "relational aesthetics"? In any case, von Bonin's use of style as a means of elaborating games between subjects and objects, between the artist and her works, is as controlling as it is evasive. It is here the contemporary subject loses its distance from the commodity, but it is also the place where distances can be reappropriated and made strange again. It is how the octopus moves through museums. □



JOHN KELSEY IS AN ARTIST AND CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

"In "The Non-productive Attitude," a text written on the occasion of the group exhibition "Make Your Own Life: Artists In and Out of Cologne" (which was organized by Bennett Simpson at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, in 2006 and included von Bonin), Josef Strau writes of the uneasy "fusion of glam and politics" in a context where critical strategies were often infected by envy and fear.



JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM. HE IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE COLLECTIVE BERNADETTE CORPORATION AND COFOUNDER OF REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART IN NEW YORK. HIS TEXT "SCULPTURE IN AN ABANDONED FIELD" WAS INCLUDED IN THE CATALOGUE FOR RACHEL HARRISON'S EXHIBITION "IF I DID IT" AT GREENE NAFTALI IN NEW YORK IN 2007. EINE PINOT GRIGIO, BITTE, A SCREENPLAY BY BERNADETTE CORPORATION, WAS PUBLISHED THIS YEAR BY STERNBERG PRESS.

## John Kelsey

**1** *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers, 1975/2007* Seminal, groundbreaking, and important are words typically used to describe this two-room artwork by Belgian ex-poet Broodthaers, which was presented for the first time in New York this past summer at Michael Werner Gallery. Dust off the nineteenth-century canons and stuffed python, unpack the twentieth-century pistols and patio furniture, and see what Mike Kelley was talking about in 1995, when he called Broodthaers's approach "hokey and obvious," yet admirable in its way of being so "sincere and insincere at the same time." The work is like a movie set propped with ready-made stand-ins for Europe's modern colonial history. Decades before "installation art" became a household term, *Décor*—an early, more playful instance of institutional critique—went quaintly and deviously to war. The uptown display coincided with a downtown screening, organized by White Columns, of the artist's strange short films at Anthology Film Archives.

**2** *Grindhouse* Written, produced, and directed by Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino, this B-movie double feature is interrupted by trailers for other fictional productions, gaps representing missing reels, and fake print damage. The first part, Rodriguez's *Planet Terror*, is a schlock zombie apocalypse. The second is Tarantino's excellent hot-rod picture, *Death Proof*, a narrative that is also split in two—like a highway, the A and B sides of a record, or a brain. Two ensembles of actresses (including Rosario Dawson, Vanessa Ferlito, and the stuntwoman Zoë Bell, playing herself) eat up the screen as the film veers between Rohmer-esque conversation and bursts of bodily violence,

cut to upbeat songs like "Hold Tight" by Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich.

**3** *Relax It's Only a Bad Cosima von Bonin Show* The catalogue accompanying Merlin Carpenter's exhibition at Galerie Bleich-Rossi in Vienna is one of the most anarchically devised artist's books in print. Portraits of the artist posing with blank canvases in a hellish art-supply store, slick ads for Mercedes-Benz bicycles (which have appeared as readymades in other Carpenter shows), painters' easels and paintings of easels, and texts by Carpenter and his sister appear in separate, brochurelike sections with brutally mismatched formats, barely bound by a flimsy white thread. Designed by Non-Format, the book prefers not to come together around its subject.

**4** *I.U.D.* Minimal, pounding, contagious noise-music made by two women—Lizzi Bougatsos (of Gang Gang Dance) and Sadie Laska—on two drum kits and two microphones. *Dead Womb*, seven inches of vinyl, was released in September on the Social Registry label and was celebrated with shows at Brooklyn venues Studio B and Glasslands.

**5** *Ode to the Man Who Kneels* Following his *End of Reality*, 2006, a play constructed around a series of monologues and brawls, Richard Maxwell's new musical is a western set in a town called Grid that deals out strange, stripped-down violence and "basic," even stranger language and songs. Characters are killed, but they don't stop singing. *Ode* was presented at the Performing Garage in New York in early November with a cast of Jim Fletcher, Anna Kohler, Emily Cass McDonnell, Greg Mehrtens, and Brian Mendes, and with Mike Iveson on piano and Maxwell on guitar.

**6** *Freelance Stenographer* A sort of antihappening by Seth Price and Kelley Walker was produced on-site at The Kitchen on April 2. It began with a projected video comprising footage of a semifictional New York dance-pop group named the Economist (Cory Arcangel, Emily Sundblad, and Stefan Tcherepnin) at work in the studio, video material from The Kitchen's own archive (a restaged Oskar Schlemmer performance), an appropriated documentary in progress about the interactive cyber-community Second Life, shots of New York skylines, and rudimentary digital effects—and was followed by a Q&A with the artists. Everything was recorded in real time by a professional stenographer whose transcription was photocopied and distributed as an instant document of its own making. The "event" was a self-recording machine instantly filed away in the no time it took to translate live into archive.

**7** *Dot Dot Dot, Issue 14 ("S as in SStenographer"), Summer 2007* This issue of *Dot Dot Dot*, a journal published by Dexter Sinister, appropriates a rejected cover design for *Cabinet magazine*. Inside is an interview with former Revolver publisher Christoph Keller, who discusses dilettantism, distillation, and his current farm life while serving homemade schnapps to the editors from bottles of his own design. Other highlights deal with modern histories of book design, Richard Hamilton's *Collected Words*, and the "aesthetics of distribution."

**8** *Evas Arche und der Feminist* During their Sunday-night gatherings at Passerby in New York, hosts Pati Hertling, an art-restitution lawyer, and her collaborator, artist Marlous Borm, serve homemade soup and bottled beer

while their friends eat, exhibit, drink, and perform. For Sunday #8, which was given over to artist Kerstin Brätsch, they covered the exhibition "New York Is Dead" with sheets of black protective plastic before opening Eva's doors to a musical act by Ronnie Bass, Jeremy Eilers, and Nic Xedro; Allison Katz and Georgia Sagri (accompanied by Brätsch); and DJ Antek Walczak.

**9** *"77 Testicular Imprints"* To make the works in his exhibition at Roth Gallery in New York, Nicolás Guagnini used oil paint and his own balls for a brush, marking and citing a series of archival documents (including an early, typewritten Dan Graham poem and personal stationery recovered from Hitler's bunker). A brute, faux-macho gesture of signing and appropriation, but also a critical operation undermining the notions of property, inclusion, and value. The "imprints" are smart and stupid like Broodthaers's recurring, museological eagles, and as elegant in their conception—until you start noticing the pubic hairs stuck in the paint.

**10** *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* George Baker's book, published by MIT Press, is the first in English dealing specifically with Picabia's Dada work in Paris and is a serious rethinking of the readymade (the other, *Picabian* one) based on a study of the artist's singularly multifarious practice. Once, before an audience of friends, Picabia broke open an alarm clock and used its parts as paintbrushes. He also cut a hole in a sheet of paper and called it *Jeune Fille*. Baker's book has a shiny golden cover with a reproduction of Picabia's *Natures Mortes*, 1920—a "portrait" consisting of a crucified stuffed monkey surrounded by the names of famous Impressionists. □

1. Marcel Broodthaers, *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers, 1975/2007*, mixed media. Installation view, Galerie de France, Paris, 2007. Photo: Patrick Müller. © 2007 Estate of Marcel Broodthaers/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SABAM, Brussels. 2. Poster for fictitious movie *Death Proof* from Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino's *Grindhouse* (2007). 3. Merlin Carpenter's artist's book/catalogue for his exhibition "Relax It's Only a Bad Cosima von Bonin Show," 2007, Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Vienna. 4. Photocollage of members of I.U.D., 2007. 5. Richard Maxwell, *Ode to the Man Who Kneels*, 2007. Performance view, Bollwerk International Festival, Fribourg, Switzerland, 2007. 6. Seth Price and Kelley Walker, *Freelance Stenographer*, 2007, still from a color video, 33 minutes 6 seconds. 7. Cover of *Dot Dot Dot*, no. 14 (Summer 2007). 8. Documentary photograph of *Evas Arche und der Feminist #8* at Gavin Brown's Enterprise at Passerby, New York, 2007. 9. Nicolás Guagnini, *77 Testicular Imprints* (detail), 2007, one of seventy-seven oil paintings on paper, dimensions variable. 10. Cover of George Baker's *Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (MIT Press, 2007).

#Étant donnés #John Berger #classical portrait painter painting a nude #privilege #gaze #The Young-Girl and the Selfie #Sarah Gram #Yukio Mishima #confidential criticism #debasement #narcissism #La Jalousie #Emily Sundblad #John Kelsey #predilection #grrrls #images #collection #La Belle et la Bête #mirror #Orphée #Cocteau





**WHEN THE CHESHIRE CAT'S** disembodied head comes unmoored from the picture plane and, like a ball in oil, begins to roll in our RealD glasses, it asks through its floating grin whether Alice is really *the* Alice. We are actually watching two movies when we watch 3-D, thanks to a "circularly polarizing" technology that involves splitting the projected light into two series of rapidly alternating images—a right-eye image that circles clockwise, like the cat's head, and a left-eye image that circles counterclockwise; 3-D glasses with oppositely circularly polarized lenses ensure that each eye can see only one image. Plunked onto the picture's CGI ground is Mia Wasikowska, the live-action actress playing an Alice who's once again losing track of both her direction and her identity, this time in the visual woods of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, which has been loosely adapted from Lewis Carroll's books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. No longer a child, in this version Alice returns to the site of her original adventures as a nineteen-year-old who has fallen back down the rabbit hole on the very day of her wedding engagement. And Wonderland, it turns out, is actually called Underland—on her first visit, as a seven-year-old, she had misheard the word. Meanwhile, during her twelve-year absence, Underland has been festering in a sort of depression and is now

Installed in many homes, the Minitel was France's first glimpse of pervasive communication. Letting its users chat with one another, make online purchases, train reservations, check stock prices, search the telephone directory, and have a mail box. In Virginie Despentes' novel *Fuck Me*, set in the French banlieues (before a killing spree takes the characters on a voyage) one of them has a revelation, ignited by a ringing phone, minutes after she strangles her roommate. *"The phone has always seemed hostile and menacing to her. No way of knowing who's calling or why. Always the same ring, whatever the news is. The feeling that people on the outside are trying to keep an eye on her, track her down right to her place and let her know that they can get in when they want. Now she's done something that makes the fear of telephones a reality. All those stupid worries, that low rumble of fear. That feeling of being left out. All those familiar things that had no meaning for her. Well, now she's done what was needed to make her reality and the reality of others coincide a little better."*



# Lost in Space

JOHN KELSEY ON TIM BURTON'S ALICE IN WONDERLAND



Tim Burton, *Alice in Wonderland*, 2010, still from a color video converted to 3-D, 108 minutes. From left: The Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp), Alice (Mia Wasikowska), and the White Queen (Anne Hathaway).

of an age that was hugely od, inventing complex, re the enforced cultural adulthood on which Burton's Underland (like *and Scissorhands* [1990] trary, reflects a contem- ing adolescence, where o. His Alice could easily , and *Alice* screenwriter ke many devices from asy-adventure genre in on a good-versus-evil th mean monsters, etc., o the mastery of visual so that she can finally er garden-party reality. ear-old encounters the institutional codes (dis- tiquette) distorted in a gonist confronts some- ed and operative media- ends and inhabits) as a mastery. The new Alice s a *jeune fille* who strug- in a highly engineered free!). reams the Red Queen, med separately with an that when magnified to d pasted back onto her ooks seamless, its pixels

no larger than the others. So the queen's head is both off and on. Carroll's books include jokes about heads, too: Alice is told that she can travel Wonderland by mail, since she has a head and so do postage stamps. In the film, digitally enhanced heads are frequently "stitched" onto live-action bodies and vice versa: Crispin Glover's live-action head is glued to a body stretched to nearly seven feet tall, and the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) sports a head rigged with inhumanly large green eyes. These hybrid visuals are one of the ways by which Burton translates Alice's disorienting movements through the twisted topologies of Carroll's books. They are also the latest instance of the director's ongoing pursuit of a designer image in which humans and cartoons trade places or finally lose their distinction. With 3-D (Burton shot the film in 2-D and later transferred it to 3-D), heads are allowed to float and roll not only free of bodies but (as if) freed from the screen. Yet if the movie screen has become a sort of looking glass through which Burton's characters can pass in occasional sequences, dancing disembodied in the space between our polarized eyeballs and our brains, why do we remain so disenchanted throughout the experience? One reason is that the stretched-out space of IMAX 3D is not at all infinite: It feels as though the screen space has extra depth now, but we only seem to gain about twenty or thirty immersive feet on either side of the usual rectangle. It's like an oversize, animated pop-up book. Also, the depth of field in most shots seems somehow squashed, and all the CGI-generated and baroquely ornamented forests and waterfalls seem a little dim and soft in focus behind the bodies that



Tim Burton, *Alice in Wonderland*, 2010, still from a color video converted to 3-D, 108 minutes. From top: The Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter). The Cheshire Cat (voice by Stephen Fry).

occupy the frame's center. (What work best in 3-D are flat, graphic logos—for instance, the IMAX logo itself.) A recent formula in cinema has been the casting of relatively inexpensive, nonmarquee actors whose performances become the bases for multimillion-dollar "digital puppets": Andy Serkis played Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003), Zoe Saldana was the female lead in *Avatar* (2009), and so on. At this point, movie extras can be almost entirely done away with, especially in blurry battle scenes where detail isn't so noticeable. Virtual actors are being painstakingly concocted on computer screens, and technology now allows both the reanimation of dead talent (whose images can be licensed through a company called GreenLight) and the cloning of younger versions of "aged, agèd" actors (a spy Jeff Bridges will return in the upcoming *Tron: Legacy*) through the scanning of earlier films' frames and their subsequent reprocessing via digital-animation programs. In other words, the boundary between animation and live performance is quickly dissolving, and we are already hearing terms like "virtual performance" and "virtual camera," already watching seamless hybrids at work in films like *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* [2008]. With the plotting of live-action facial performances onto head-shaped digital grids, the insertion of

translate the systematic distortions of sense or the flat-out joys of Lewis Carroll's books (which are already so screenlike). Depp's performance, it should be noted, remains somehow faithful to Carroll's inventiveness: It is all on the surface and is generative of surfaces. Interpreting the hatter's madness as the spread of mercury poisoning, he plays mental deterioration out on the skin, communicating sudden mood shifts as a rapid shuffling of masks, via makeup, costume, and abrupt changes of accent in his speech. Mostly working against green screens, Depp manages to tap Carrollian speed: His solution is to become a screen himself. But the surface speeds on which the literary adventure depends are otherwise lost in the film. While "revolutionary" film technology allows the hypermanagement and control of every square millimeter of screen space, we may miss the holes and gaps (in space and in meaning) movies once had. Cutting is not so easy in 3-D: The images have to be melded and synthesized, and rapid or hard edits (as with sudden shifts in depth of field) disturb the viewer's experience of immersion. So we are losing the differences and intervals between images, too, and movies forget to breathe or think as they once did. It's now a matter of compositing multiple layers (live and animated), performances, and shoots to produce a single, seamless

sequence, and this requires many slow months of work by roomfuls of technicians. There is no end to shooting: Once the performances have been "captured," they can be endlessly reshot after the fact, with virtual cameras. Virtual cameras have no lenses; they are programs used to re-angle and recompose raw performances on the computer, and these can also be layered onto CGI bodies or backgrounds and inserted into pans, zooms, or tracking shots that are all digitally constructed in what was once called postproduction. But there is no more postproduction, because there is no longer a defined time and space of production. And if there is no established set, then neither is there an off-set (and therefore no exit from work, or "performance"). As movies attempt to move offscreen, too, seeming to colonize and fill this "other," unrepresentable space that films once produced in an erotic and dynamic relation to the on-screen image (the space of performance), we wonder what happens to seduction. It seems impossible to imagine an erotics of full immersion and full-time programming. Carroll was a "logician with a taste for children," an upstanding representative of the institutional order (as a lecturer in mathematics at Oxford) in relation to which his experimental nonsense was elaborated. His perversion involved luring proper little girls into the comedy of meaning, enchanting them with double and contradictory interpretations of both words and social codes, with anarchic games of cultural decoding and recoding. Burton submits his Alice to the pure power of the code, and every displacement has been programmed. When Alice grows and shrinks, he shows her slipping into and out of her variously scaled dresses, a sort of programmed, 3-D (PG) striptease. How much stranger and more perverse were the light-sensitive photographic plates that Carroll himself produced, posing his child subjects stock-still (as if dreaming) against the backgrounds of their Victorian homes and gardens. Burton moves his teen Alice through the film like a JPEG within a design program, submitting her to various manipulations and mobilizations. What we get on-screen is a young woman successfully coming to grips with the use of her own self-image, learning from the program how to finally (endlessly) put herself to work. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.

#Bartleby, the Scrivener #preference #fascination  
#Neurasthenia #Minitel #Virginie Despentès #PUNCHLINE  
#of the slopes #outsiders #brigands #Baise-moi #Bruce  
Benderson #Toward the New Degeneracy #Léon Bloy  
#Über seinen eigenen Schatten springen #Gynocracy Song



VENICE '11

# The Ignorant Schoolmaster

JOHN KELSEY

DID THE VERSION OF THE "OPEN WORK" we inherited from relational aesthetics ever suspect that it was already infected with a pathological possibility, that the office without walls and the convivial zone of the project could also be spaces of violence and death? If the installation was the aesthetic form best suited to a spreading, cybercapitalist nowhere, it probably shared Empire's inability to spatialize otherness as anything but an avenging, antiproductive suicide from beyond or to invent intimacies besides the socially scripted, always already mediated encounters of the laptop screen. It seemed there was no escaping the soft, spreadable new space of contemporary art and its hyperproductive demand: Was the artwork too open, or not yet open enough? In any case, every "Utopia Station" eventually begins to dream of its own aesthetic Columbine.

As part of Norway's representation at this year's Venice Biennale, the artist Bjarne Melgaard and a team of local art students occupied a palazzo at a noticeable remove from the Giardini and its national pavilions. "Baton Sinister," a group exhibition not so much curated as topped by Melgaard, was the culmination of a study workshop he'd been leading throughout the spring at the Università IUAV di Venezia: "Beyond Death: Viral Discontents and Contemporary Notions About AIDS." When was the last time an artist talked about AIDS? Maybe the reason it seems so strange to call AIDS "contemporary" is that so much of the culture we're living now arose in reaction to that panic. We wanted to be connected, and to forget about death. We wanted to get back to work and to put euphoria to work too. Preferring to confront the ways that fear continues to shape and

distort our culture today, Melgaard reappropriates terror as both an aesthetic device and a means of countering the productive efficiency of social networks. The Palazzo Contarini Corfù's trashed, cluttered rooms were plastered floor to ceiling with graffiti, posters, and slogans, as if some kind of AIDS-obsessed, pope-hating, possibly ultra-left-wing cult had been squatting it. A hulking, brooding "Professor" Melgaard figured in paintings by one of the students. Another painting announced the glaring absence of the Black Liberation Army from the Biennale. One room was filled with rotting bananas. There was information about barebacking and bug chasers, who intentionally receive loads of HIV-infected cum in order to experience a radical intimacy with the other. The press release insisted that art could never change anything.

View of "Baton Sinister," 2011, an exhibition by Bjarne Melgaard and students, Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice. Photo: Guilio Squillacciotti.



SEPTEMBER 2011 295



From left: View of "Baton Sinister," 2011, an exhibition by Bjarne Melgaard and students, Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice. Photo: Corinne Mazzoli. Paola Angellini, *We: I and Me: He and She*, 2011, oil on canvas, 69 x 61". Installation view, Palazzo Contarini Corfù, Venice. From "Baton Sinister."

## Bjarne Melgaard's "Baton Sinister" can be seen as a brutal, happy catastrophe of relational aesthetics.

Here, pedagogy is a rampant, disorderly space of infection, where untimely or disavowed knowledge returns not as education but as the destabilizing possibility of social and ethical contamination. Directing our attention back to the late urban culture of the 1980s, when pre-relational practices such as transgressive literature, sex workerism, punk feminism, s/m, and "death porn" captivated the Foucault-reading brains and bodies of downtown Manhattan and San Francisco, Melgaard at the same time performs a sort of archaeology of the present, tracing the lineage of a gay terrorist movement that never happened. Asking why we missed the boat, Melgaard shows no love for the white-collar activism of ACT UP or for the legalization of gay marriage. The manic antagonism that drives his practice is steeped in a melancholic vision of the way contemporary culture absorbs and neutralizes any insurrectional desire almost instantly. So he's made an installation against installations, founded on a workshop about death,

and opened up a speculation of the baton sinister, a multiplying illegitimacy—thamagration within neoliberal the end of neoliberalism's the artist's website, www

The show's centerpiece cultural theorist Leo Bersani, *Interviews Leo Bersani*, screen beneath an antique Known for his essay "Is t and for his studies on the ism by a gay culture th focused on issues of right suit opposite Melgaard encounter. He sidesteps ism and bashing back a preferring to speak ab "modes of intimacy" and ical "illegitimacy" as a fi dictates and assumptions. As if to underline the imp the space of the TV inter this, too, making digital Bersani's on-screen bodie lewd, orgasmic cybergr conversation with lowbr final murder scene from candy-colored intertitl etc.), and other intrusiv of the late artist David W closed with thread (Siler out of the talk show.

296 ARTFORUM

On a sunny afternoon in the park the young girl joined me with whiskey, and climbed on my lap while I recounted how as a teenager an opossum died in my backyard. I'd made a habit of visiting the corpse daily. It was in the beginning of autumn and the coolness slowed down putrefaction denying me the irruption of flesh and crawling maggots. But I was compensated for weeks with an almost imperceptible degeneration. Eventually the skin on the cheeks withered around the bone as the muscle and fats leaked into the soil or evaporated. Her petit posterior gracefully adjusted, I paused, and looking down at the many holes in her torn black stockings contemplated putting a finger in. Eventually the body was just a matted patch of hair, and I had contracted the uncanny ability to see reification. As I finished my story she was dappled by the sun—about a dog I had whose face was equine, and every time I would look at the pup I would see the opossum. Eventually I just gave the dog away— she was too far along and besides an old woman used to call nagging for her.





ative space—under the sign  
medieval heraldic emblem sig-  
at abandons all hope of inte-  
society, as well as any fear of  
normalizing humanism. (See  
terroraddict.com.)

ce is a video interview with  
ni (*Untitled [Bjarne Melgaard*  
2011), playing on a big flat-  
e Murano-glass chandelier.  
he Rectum a Grave?" (1987)  
e forfeiture of experimental-  
at's become increasingly  
ts, Bersani appears in a gray  
d in this *Charlie Rose*-like  
the artist's themes of terror-  
against the hetero oppressor,  
out the invention of new  
embracing social and polit-  
rst step toward resisting the  
of heteronormative society.  
possibility of intimacy within  
view, Melgaard has trashed  
cocks sprout out of his and  
es, splattering the video with  
affiti, and interrupting the  
ow bursts of dated MTV, the  
*Looking for Mr. Goodbar*,  
es (HATE FUCK, DIE IN ME,  
e fragments. The mute face  
ojnarowicz, his lips stitched  
nce = Death), flickers in and

"Baton Sinister" starts from an aesthetics of impo-  
tence and impoverishment as theorized by Bersani but  
pushes these ideas into an aggressive practice in which  
the form of the installation begins to communicate  
with a politics of occupation. Melgaard is the "igno-  
rant schoolmaster" who knows that knowledge is like  
a cock that can be taken in any number of ways, from  
behind or below or without permission. The exhibi-  
tion can be seen as a brutally kitsch catastrophe of  
relational aesthetics: The open work rediscovers its  
own death drive, exposing us to the dead end of com-  
munication. At the missing center of the installation,  
the gay terrorist movement that never was stands in  
for everything that is already unworking the artwork,  
and for the limit this unworking exposes us to.

Meanwhile in Basel, the question of relational  
aesthetics and its continuing legacy returned with  
*Kopfbau!*, another sort of occupation, this time on  
the Messeplatz, in a building slated for demolition  
later this year. Organized by the "international net-  
work" and publisher e-flux, on a site immediately  
adjacent to the Art Basel fair, this intervention com-  
bined the productive promise of the symposium with  
the creative conviviality of the artist residency and  
featured the participation of live DJs and a group of  
students invited from the Städelschule in Frankfurt.  
On the occasion of this gathering, e-flux released *Are*  
*You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity,*  
*and the Labor of Art*, a collection of essays by writers  
such as Diedrich Diederichsen, Lars Bang Larsen,  
Bifo, and Liam Gillick (who also showed up to film  
a segment of his ongoing "soap opera" *A Guiding*  
*Light*). I didn't experience any of this firsthand

(apart from poking my head into a DJ performance  
with a throbbing digital-video projection), so I'll  
quote from the press release:

... a constellation of projects situated somewhere  
between exhibitions of art and the concrete forms of  
sociality encountered in everyday life. Conceived as  
an independent universe with its own bar, hotel,  
shops, admissions, and so forth, this project oper-  
ates in parallel, and as the inverse to the neighboring  
art fair: operating during alternative hours and in  
surprising and often paradoxical ways, and ranging  
in scope from the educational to playfully predatory  
and mercantile. Its component parts draw on a wide  
circle of institutions, artists, curators, and writers  
who have been involved with various e-flux projects  
over the past several years...

*Kopfbau!*'s playful announcement was a black card in  
the form of a fake Art Basel VIP badge, which arrived  
in the same packet as the real VIP card.

Doing what it does best, putting art professionals  
in touch and networking like mad while asking us  
to ask ourselves about the networking of art labor,  
e-flux, too, seemed to envision an installation to end  
all installations. Framing nothing besides post-Fordist  
bodies at work/play, *Kopfbau!* did not pretend to  
critique the fair next door (anyway, everyone work-  
ing there is already a client and user of the network);  
it simply demonstrated that we ourselves, finally, are  
the real contemporary art product and encouraged  
us to get busy. These days, critical self-reflexivity  
in art functions mainly as a sign of connectedness,  
producing network-value and network-legitimacy.  
Redistributing current discourse on the networking  
of labor and knowledge, e-flux seems to want to be  
the meta-information of art, both the network and  
the idea of the network. But it is not clear how e-flux's  
extension of the art fair's hours into party time (doesn't  
this happen anyway?) generated any paradox or sur-  
prise in Basel, beyond the branding of the big *B* with  
a small, viral new *e*.

Recent reports that "random matrix theory," a  
mathematical tool for predicting the behavior of the  
stock market, is now being applied to AIDS research,  
confirm the suspicion that the chaos inside us is in no  
way separate from the cybercapitalist virus that's  
infected the rest of the metropolis. Like art, life is  
now a branch of economics. When, using this algo-  
rithmic predictor, we are finally able to reduce the  
noise of HIV, and the virus begins to communicate  
as information, new drugs will go to work. And then,  
perhaps inevitably, another death will find us. At a  
certain point, the artwork, like the body, finally  
resists communication, stops working. This is how  
the space of the work exposes us to its own limit, and  
ours. This is the intimacy at the end of the work. □

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.



#Marcy and Greene #Evan Williams #Midwest #Bardo  
Thodol #Une Saison en Enfer #I is another emotional  
landscape #Iggy & The Stooges #Your Pretty Face Is Going  
To Hell #Yoni #Untitled (2003) #Andrea Fraser #Lingam  
#Anne Carson #decreation #Simone Weil #loss of appetite  
#Der Tod und das Mädchen #Santa Muerte #Lethe



# Next-Level Spleen

JOHN KELSEY



Steve McQueen, *Shame*, 2011.  
35 mm, color, 101 minutes.  
Brandon (Michael Fassbender).

FOR MOST ARTISTS TODAY, the laptop and phone have already supplanted the studio as primary sites of production. Early signs of this shift were evident in what became known as relational aesthetics, which, in retrospect, seems wrongly defined as a practice in which communal experience became the medium. It is more properly understood, rather, as a capitalist-realist adaptation of art to the experience economy, obviously, but also to the new productive imperative to go mobile, as a body and a practice. In other words, community declared itself a medium at

the very moment that it was laying itself open to displacements it could never survive. Meanwhile, exhibitions were planned on laptops, then dragged and dropped into institutions. Work took a discursive turn, meaning it was now efficiently distributable on a global scale. In the mid-1990s, the figure of the artist, too, seemed to undergo a decisive mutation: The Margiela-clad PowerBook user was more nomadic and adaptive than his antecedents, smoother and more agreeable, better organized and more instantly connected with other members of the burgeoning

creative class that had emerged on the front lines of economic deregulation. The contemporary artist now functioned as a sort of lubricant, as both a tourist and a travel agent of art, following the newly liberated flows of capital while seeming always to be just temping within the nonstop tempo of increasingly flexible, dematerialized projects, always just passing through. This was all vaguely political, too, in a Negrish sort of way that promoted the emancipatory possibilities of connection and communication, linking the new speed of culture to the “convivial”

spirit of everything relational. The mutation of the artist continued to follow its irrevocable logic until we eventually arrived at the fully wireless, fully precarious, Adderall-enhanced, manic-depressive, post- or hyperrelational figure who is more networked than ever but who presently exhibits signs of panic and disgust with a speed of connection that we can no longer either choose or escape. Hyperrelational aesthetics emerged between 9/11 and the credit crisis and so can be squarely situated in relation to the collapse of the neoliberal economy, or more accurately to the situation of its drawn-out living death, since neoliberalism continues to provide both the cause and the only available cure for its own epic failure.

No feasible—or even recognizable—form of political engagement appears on the hyperrelational horizon, and no real horizon either, so we engage speed itself, attempting to overflow given spaces of politics with the disruptive force of the leak. If relational art aestheticized community, it did so in a decadent way, reading Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* in the context of Thatcher’s “There is no such thing as society” and Deleuze in advance of e-flux. For the postrelational artist, however, nothing is more detestable than smart, spreadable conviviality, because the problem now is that togetherness can no longer be experienced outside of aesthetics, and there’s no more avoiding the fact that isolation has been systematically designed into connectivity. Nowadays, networks are referenced and theorized ad nauseam, but no longer with any utopian sentiments attached. Last year, we read about Twitter revolutions in the mainstream press at the same time that we skimmed journals such as *Collapse* and *Sic*, belated translations of *Tiqqun*, and the sci-fi novels of Maurice Dantec (“post-World” scenarios involving humans becoming modems, the terminal loss of language and bodies). There was also Occupy, which seemed like it could have been anything—a viral insurrection, an aggressively peopled kind of live-stream, a general strike—until it was surrounded by police and bogged itself down in democratic process. Still, a permanent fault line may have been produced in that moment, inasmuch as the return to normal hasn’t been entirely convincing either.

The network-disgust that’s experienced by even the most positive-minded artists today is captured in our continued abuse of the meme “LOL,” which becomes ever more applicable in direct correlation to the degree that we overkill it and wear it out. Not even a word, the term itself performs the loss of language and of laughter, even. It’s a disembodied and thus efficiently transmissible abbreviation of laughter that in its repetition seems to reveal both the ecstasy and the anxiety of our nonstop displacement within social media. An overwritten, highbrow press release

about networks may be LOL. ingly failed painting. But m amputation of laughter from ing as the silent, poison-dart-l within a network. The more functions as the postlaughter always somehow aimed at the munal connectivity.

Back home after the open show about “networked pain Gallery in New York), I’m around the exhibition’s title. Aside from a possible reference context of the early 1990s a vaguely LOL echoes it may cybernetic noncontext of B mostly I’m thinking, What els but that networks have decid and that the only critical o present art today as a stomach lic, in real time? Except that th and there is no more public, conveniently impossible place pretends to finish itself off for it’s a show about hyperrelat age of high-speed connectivity Michael Krebber, Merlin Ca Bjarne Melgaard, and R. H. C the next-generation gallerists these and other names vag same time inflicting LOL de them, or on the notion of th while casting serious doub positively inhabiting something work (or city, for that matter sage here is that “network’ topic and a shamelessly with ings in this economic End of get this painting-thing, you connected to—a direct link to sic value, the “general intelle community. It’s difficult to say most favorably positioned wi self-trolling spiderweb of “C the joke we’re all in on has to and insecure the artist has b context we’ve inherited from the LOL thing to do with this it as painting.

Baudelairean spleen— channel—was always connec ern beauty, was maybe even Any channeling of beauty tod in relation to crisis and the s rity. The outmoding of the st of the artist herself, as we del

One evening she came over and we sat on my bed and watched *Lovely Andrea*, Hito Steyerl’s film about Japanese bondage. When the UBU web stream stalled, I brought us sliced oranges and strawberries, and we discussed the term *radical localism* from a kelly green Chris Kraus book I’d been given the week before. At an impasse we didn’t so much as consent that the precarity of restraint was tedious, but began clumsily removing our round glasses, as our bodies drew in, pulling off one another’s clothing.

Instantaneously I saw her turn from trinkets of self-contained imagery to squiggling desire. In the bulge of her pelvis, I found, a whirlwind of hair and torrents of laughter. And at the moment her torso rose, I sunk my fingers into the shallow pocket of her vulva.

Afterwards, to invade the quietness of her breaths, I paused at the tip of my tongue on her teeth, and as I drew in I felt her smile unlacing our bounds.



Or a JPEG of a know-  
mostly *LOL* signals the  
the body and its recod-  
like flight of a postword  
we abuse it, the more it  
r of wit minus bodies,  
e bad faith of postcom-

ing of a summer group  
nting” (at Zach Feuer  
still getting my head  
“Context Message.”  
e to the *Kontext Kunst*  
nd to whatever faded,  
y be producing in the  
erlin—New York now,  
e could the message be  
edly replaced context,  
ption remaining is to  
a digesting itself in pub-  
the stomach is a network  
because cities are just  
es to hang out while art  
good. In other words,  
ional decadence in the  
y, with real paintings by  
penter, Jutta Koether,  
Quayman, as well as by  
and bloggers who keep  
uely viral while at the  
egrees of insecurity on  
e artist profile, mean-  
t on the possibility of  
ng like a context or net-  
). The other *LOL* mes-  
is both a critical hot  
-it way of selling paint-  
Days: Not only do you  
also get everything it’s  
something like extrin-  
ct” of an invisible post-  
which of these artists is  
thin the self-terrorizing,  
Context Message,” but  
do with how paranoid  
come within the non-  
relational aesthetics,  
t on the possibility of  
s feeling being to reblog

or disgust as a poetic  
cted to an idea of mod-  
its preferred medium.  
ay would have to occur  
ublime of viral insecu-  
udio and possibly even  
iver our human capaci-



Above: View of “Context Message,” 2012, Zach Feuer Gallery, New York.  
From left: Trevor Shimizu, *Spa Castle Detail*, 2010; Trevor Shimizu,  
*Spa Castle*, 2010; Lola Pettway, *Housetop Medallion*, 2004; Martin  
Kippenberger, *Koln’s Flocken*, ca. 1980; Elaine Reichel, *Sampler*  
(*Othello*), 2001; Uli Hohn, *Untitled*, 1993; Nicolas Guagnini, *Responsive*  
*Eye* (Bridget 7), 2012.



Michael Krebber and Tyler Dobson,  
*Bad Joke Painting 1*, 2010–12,  
acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40”.

ties over to network speed, provides the strange new  
conditions under which any coming aesthetics must  
emerge. So we will have to make poetry of the fact  
that language does not survive speed. Wasn’t Paul  
Virilio already approaching something like an art  
of speed and catastrophe in books such as *The*  
*Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1980) and *The Accident*  
*of Art* (2005)? The poststudio has become the non-  
site of production as circulation, with some sort of  
artist plugged into it. Via this connection, the figure  
of the artist herself dematerializes, becomes a pro-  
file—viral, bloggable, friendable, and defrienable—  
her most abstract work being herself, or her own  
connectivity. And there’s no way to separate the  
mobilization of this abstract, disappearing artist  
from the wider, systemic (and some would say  
anthropological) crisis we are living through now:  
The two phenomena are linked to the same automa-  
tisms, installed within the same futureless no-time of  
cybernetworks. We wonder whether art is possible  
after Facebook (and, for that matter, whether even  
Facebook is possible after Facebook). If the artist

# Next-level spleen is the affective register of undecidable friendship within the hyperrelational networks that enmesh us so ex-intimately today, in this panicked, postlaughter moment of blogger terror.

today is a sort of “friend,” she always already  
includes the possibility of being a nonfriend or a bad  
friend. Next-level spleen, in other words, is also  
linked to the threat of defriending that’s implicit in  
friending. It’s the affective register of undecidable  
friendship within the hyperrelational networks that  
enmesh us so ex-intimately today, in this panicked,  
postlaughter moment of blogger terror. Networks  
are themselves delirious, paranoid structures; we all  
know that they can be a medium for betrayal, too.

Some recent movies deploy characters who could  
be stand-ins for the postrelational artist. There  
is Michael Fassbender’s depressive sexaholic in  
*Shame*, who connects with all New York women  
while retreating into ever more harrowing experi-  
ences of remoteness and narcissistic exile. There are  
the high-speed couples of last year’s nearly identical

rom-coms *Friends with Benefits* and *No Strings*  
*Attached*, who detach in order to connect more effi-  
ciently, constructing a handy iCouple within the  
no-time of the metropolitan interface. There’s also  
Charlize Theron’s alcoholic teen-romance writer in  
*Young Adult*, who, when she ventures out of the  
solitary confinement of her high-rise home office, is  
confronted with the fact that real-life connection is  
no longer available to her: She (or the world, or  
adulthood) is already too far gone. All of these cases  
involve successful professionals exiled in the midst  
of their own hyperrelational activities, who’ve lost  
the possibility of experiencing otherness except in the  
banal, flattened-out terms of the screen profile, who  
can only interface and data roam, whether online or  
in bed. The abstraction of the body within the screen-  
like void of the social is performed by actors who  
seem to Skype their gestures and tweet their lines,  
reformatting acting for the windowlike stages of Net  
space. These are performances of distributed affect.

If to work and communicate as artists today is to  
extend this cybercapitalist desolation and contribute  
to the dis-ease of metropolitan togetherness, it seems  
inevitable that we’ve arrived at a splenetic experience  
of abstraction. Whatever community we share now  
is the one that constantly sabotages itself: the anti-  
community of networked souls. Franco Berardi and  
others have written about a depressive epidemic  
that’s both symptomatic of and structurally integral  
to capitalism’s development as an info-sphere, to  
economic deregulation under conditions of high-  
speed exchange. The posthuman speed of circulation  
means that the world now escapes our capacity for  
attention and that we’ve lost our time for otherness,  
and therefore for ourselves. Under the present dis-  
pensation, *connection* is defined as the functional  
relationship between formatted materials or compo-  
nents. Via networks, human relations are reformat-  
ted to the pure syntax of the operating system. In  
other words, bodies become desingularized as time  
and attention are extracted (fracked) from the living  
person. And as a defensive reflex, we disconnect in the  
midst of communication, meaning we depress our-  
selves, shut down, make time. The title of Berardi’s  
book *The Soul at Work* (2009) suggests a sequel: *The*  
*Soul on Strike*, in which individualized depressions  
would link up to form a channel or medium for a  
radical interruption. Occupy depression?

The networked artist starts from the fact of being  
a human medium for metropolitan circulation and a  
modem for largely ungovernable cybercapitalist  
processes. Normally, when everything’s running  
smoothly, media disappear on us, retreating into  
their own efficiency, but in times of crisis they  
become strangely perceptible again. Systemic crisis  
could be a mirror for hallucinating the artist as



Above: Will Gluck, *Friends with*  
*Benefits*, 2011, digital video, color,  
109 minutes. Jamie Reilis (Mila  
Kunis) and Dylan Harper (Justin  
Timberlake).



Above: Ivan Reitman, *No Strings*  
*Attached*, 2011, 35 mm,  
108 minutes. Adam Franklin  
(Ashton Kutcher) and Emma  
Kurtzman (Natalie Portman).

Below: View of “Stewart Uoo: Life Is  
Juicy,” 2012, 47 Canal, New York.  
From left: Don’t Touch Me (Oil Spill),  
2012; Don’t Touch Me (Bikrahm  
Yoga), 2012; Confessions (9Women),  
2012. Photo: Joerg Lohse.



#documentary #Hito Steyerl #social practice #Radical  
Localism #funding #Kelly Lake Store & Other Stories  
#Chris Kraus #abjection cult #unreliable narrator  
#Danielle Sarréra #incubus #Là-bas #Joris-Karl Huysmans  
#naturalisme spiritualiste #shortness of breath #presence  
#Dialog mit der Jugend



1.

*Advertising doesn't impose false desires. So when I tell you that I prefer to gaze upon the florid arabesque pattern on the yellow wallpaper you must understand — I don't feel good — don't bother me.*

Stop and consider for a moment the *Darstellungsform* of commodity society — that is, the appearances of value that can only be expressed through the phenomenal identity of the exchange relation. Bring to attention here the ontological status of appearances. As Hegel was well aware, reality does not exist independently from its appearance, but is rather constitutive of social existence. The essence of the world coincides with the statistical law by which its surface is classified. This appearance of reality *as reality* does not take place in isolation, but contains its own negativity. An appearance is not *something* that appears, but rather an appearance *for-another*, an appearance that is *other than*. Activity, in its appearance, therefore must calculate how it can distinguish itself among others, while retaining an independence less precise than termination.

2.

*With keen objectivity and a certainty that comes from finitude's reflection, an audience titters in connivance at a Boy Scout who uses the reamer on his Swiss army knife to murder toads and a Girl Scout, with nothing more than a look, sells sweets.*

Socializing in the company of commodities, it is smart to come prepared with the rational kernel of publicity. Since the commodity form of value consists in its movement *for-another*, that is, to be exchanged, the logic of publicity must, somehow, saturate the dynamics of accumulation. Expressing the unity of difference and sameness, value is a social relation wherein difference is equalized into the identical, and the identical is separated out into difference.

This dynamic is demonstrated by the intrinsic relation between use-value and exchange-value. The relation both affirms and denies difference insofar as it contains the identity of the non-identical and the identical. The moment at which difference, or the exceptional, is affirmed refers to the logic of publicity, which must differentiate itself to itself as identical.

3.

Within commodity society, the formal principle of exchange is also the substantial principle of publicity, a difference *laid bare* in the identity of commensurability. Here, exchange emerges as the basis for publicity, that is to say, the *exchange of all with all*. All exchange aspires for sufficient publicity. The appearance of exchange value is the *raison d'être* of publicity, a rationale which incorporates both the act of objectifying social appearances and those appearances themselves. As Rousseau enunciated, the thirst for publicity is therefore always the thirst for the appearance of wealth, a craving for which the contradiction between the public and private self is superseded.

4.

Within the longing for publicity, aspiration is both encouraged and disappointed. The latter constitutes a modern form of poverty as the loss of advertising. Not to be recognized remains the most agonizing of tribulations.

5.

*If communication between people is hung up, switched off, or uncomfortable, picture the exchange relation grinding to a halt. Woe to the individual who doesn't make of himself a generic platform when he meets universality in the eyes of a potential sale.*

The exchange relation is the generic *par excellence*, the instantiation of the

particular to the abstract universality of the generic and of the typical. Advertising is none other than the *genre* of an individual. Individuals, claiming to be themselves, create advertising as their genre. Not however as an abstract universal power, one opposed to specific individuals, but rather as their own being, their own business, their own lives, their own creative spirit, their own criticisms, their own wealth. Here, the generic acquires a real and true existence through the idiosyncrasies of the individual. Advertising is therefore the tendency to produce oneself in everything; nothing may be unrelated to the personality.

6.

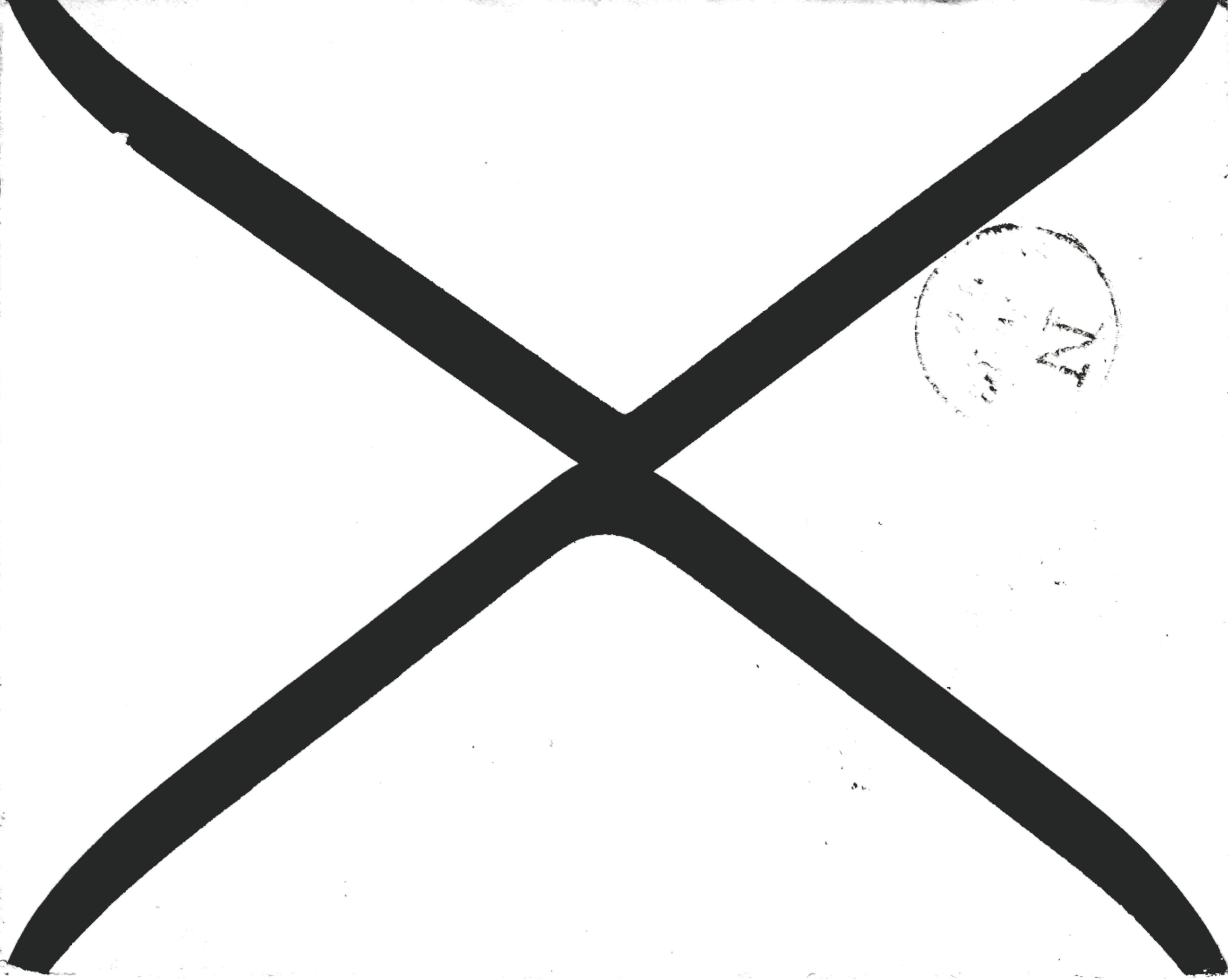
Advertising, as the revelation of the truth of the commodity as a form of appearance, must appear in its immediate promise of freedom in the creation of a world that offers all possibilities. In this immediacy, advertising depends on itself as a result. It is the beginning we deserve, one that never ceases to begin again and again, *ad infinitum* as an eternal novelty. Advertising is the appearance of the total commodity, society in all its wholeness.

7.

The advertising of a world seemingly without advertising chatters on about what it doesn't sell, and correspondingly sells what it remains silent about.

8.

Any lack of advertisements does not abolish the social necessity of advertisements. In fact, even where society has developed in the absence of advertising, its truth remains the *unity* of advertising. That is, even the lack of advertisement advertises itself. A pleasant afternoon in the Adirondacks occasions a boastful sermon on the pristine landscape devoid of image pollution,



a virtue to be appreciated by any tourist guide. “The prevailing urbanism absorbs as its ideological complement whatever fulfills the desiderata of urban life without bearing the stigmata of market society on its forehead.” The means of advertising are the means of production.

9.

It is the profound sense of advertising that drives individuals to flaunt what they have to exchange or even share. Exchange has become the purpose of advertising, while advertising has become the medium of exchange. Advertising, the widespread fame extended to all, fortifies all relations of production. The mutual dependence of individuals is manifested in perpetual need for advertising.

10.

The activity of the individual must be a pure self-exhibition. Advertising has become the only active ideological mechanism, overriding and preexisting critical judgment or transforming such judgment into a mere conditional reflex. The complex operation of sales techniques has reached the point of surprising even the ad professionals by automatically creating subjects of cultural debate.

11.

As the correlate to advertising, the purpose of the publicity of the personality, or persona, is itself the concretization of the generic as a self-generating substance. It therefore refers to no specific content, but to the self-moving commensurability of any content *made visible*.

12.

As the inseparability of the universal and the particular, the truth of the advertised personality is neither the individual or the generic, but rather the already completed and internal passage between the two. While the individual and the generic differ absolutely from one another, each appear directly in their opposite. Their truth is therefore in the movement of direct appearance of one *into the other*. The advertised personality therefore emphasizes an exceptionalism while abolishing it. The result expresses the identity of the generic with that of the individual. The nominalism of the advertised personality reflects the generic by virtue of obdurate particularity.

13.

Only in advertising is the distinction between the generic and the individual maintained. As such, advertising is never be restricted to either side of this pole, but rather operates as the dynamic movement of one into the other. Individuals must have their consistency only as generic. The individual is the absolute form while the generic is the real social substance. The advertised personality is therefore the effective unity of the absolute form with practical substance. Those seeking public recognition would therefore profit by admitting the truth of the matter: there is nothing exceptional about them. Personalities are merely the *a priori* patterned dignitaries for a ready-made world, functionaries for the intersection of countless and identical individuals.

14.

All personalities have advertising as their truth, one which subsists on any number of generalities and must possess a complete stock of accepted human qualities — such as the good, the beautiful, the curious, the innocent, the adventurous, the cynical, the ugly, the reclusive, the grotesque, or even *the*

*pornographic*. Despite their organic appearance, these personalities are assigned to mathematically exact positions. Both their efficiency and their coefficient of friction are included in the calculation. The style of the personality always guarantees some breadth of variation.

15.

To have this world, what must we be? As a phenomenal form of exchange-value, the personality — in its aspiration towards an identity of distinction — has its roots in the process for which class identities are composed. The valorization process grasped as the identity of the non-identical and the identical, wherein the relation between use-value and exchange-value unfolds the expansion of capital, has as its personification the formation of class identity. The concept of identity refers to all those conditions under which attitudes and behavior are one's own. Here, in the case of the proletariat — one pole in the class relation and the contradictory expression of capital itself — the conditions for the possibility of articulating its identity can only be that of capital. The class identity of the proletariat is the articulation of capital that manifests itself as the valorization of capital. The non-identity of the opposing classes expresses itself in the identity of the class relation as the personification of the valorization process. Class identity however is subject to the historical dynamics of accumulation itself. Since the early 1970s, for example, the proletariat asserts only a *negative* relation to itself within the capital relation and in doing so calls into question the identity of class belonging. At a slight distance from the direct wage relation would be the additional example of the identity of the intelligentsia, a role that becomes peripheral by the interwar years and erodes into a pseudo-romanticism and merchandised bohemia by the postwar period. A crisis of identity is always a crisis of the conditions of possibility for identification.



16.

The life and death of the personality unfolds in accordance with the cadences of capital accumulation, which, like the consumption of commodities, is subject to the tendencies of novelty and obsolescence. Mimicking the cyclicalty of fashion, the personality’s ability to remain beyond the season requires carefully crafted attention to one’s *pose*, which should always remain only slightly malleable so as not to appear desperate for adapting to her surroundings. While innovation may ultimately always win in its struggle against tradition, there remain exceptions that undergo only minimal alterations. For example, rendered most explicit since Chateaubriand — although its precedents obviously extend as far back as Hamlet — the quality of melancholia has sustained the uninterrupted change of styles. Here, to remain melancholic is to insist on the reliability of blue jeans. The regulating sphere of culture has not been supplanted as the primary resource for which new genres of identification are fortified. The tattered derelict becomes a piece of nostalgia through the advertised personality.

17.

The lie of the generic refers to the compulsion of individuals learning to model their existential attitudes and behavior on identikit portraits assembled together through the mechanisms of market research, opinion polls, and sociological and psychological surveys. This compulsion for advertising however does not originate in such devices, but is rather the phenomena of the personality brought to its industrialized conclusion. All intimate quirks and idiosyncrasies become the means of integrative variation. While their historical antecedents are derived from obstinate and laggard medieval ethical categories of the knight-errant, saint, sinner, hero, thief, scoundrel, troubadour, *honnête homme*, *princesse lointaine*, etc., the generic standard of the personality within the present moment, for which the entrepreneurial

freedom of the bourgeois individual remains decisive, reflects the velocity with which commodities exhibit a wealth of paltry differentiation under the law of perpetual obsolescence.

18.

Advertised personalities become the only work worthy of man in its present state — that is, social estrangement *exhibited*. As a mode of exposition constitutive of its own inverted world, the personality is a luminosity unfolding upon the terrain of the false, one for which nothing may be unrelated to it. Fastened unto a cycle of uninterruptedly repeating their own self, the closed circle of perpetual sameness ascends to omnipotence.

19.

The increasing prominence of the *artist* personality locates the meaning of an artwork within a “socio-institutional” network. Presently, art is so highly defined by personality that it can hardly be considered outside of its reception as the pathic projection of the artist personality. As a beauty contest necessitates judges, the current tendency of moneyed art production follows suit. To see the artist as a primary mover, on any rung of the art system, would be giving her too much credit and too long an occupancy within the frame. What seems relevant is tracking the adept spectacular feats that permit artists to maintain continuation: at times through a target-less belief and otherwise through the reproduction of engagement.

20.

The index, the identifiable standard that an artist produces alongside an artwork, fractures the perception of a unitary work. The means of reception, in a referential relationship to a suppositional moment of authenticity, are

adjusted to fill categories designated by the able hands of dealers and critics, and then more broadly, stocking the rolling culture industry with supplies whose trajectory survives most honestly in lobbies and cheap hotel rooms.

21.

The bourgeois and his list of restaurant recommendations. The life of the artist *is* her work. Nothing of any possible importance remains except the personality of the author, who, in turn, is no longer capable of possessing any notable quality beyond her age, a fashionable vice, and a picturesque craft. The cherry on top. The spectacularization of vacuous and talentless personalities expresses itself in the diverse forms of publicity referred to as art. For this, every artist *is* their own market; *l’art pour moi!*

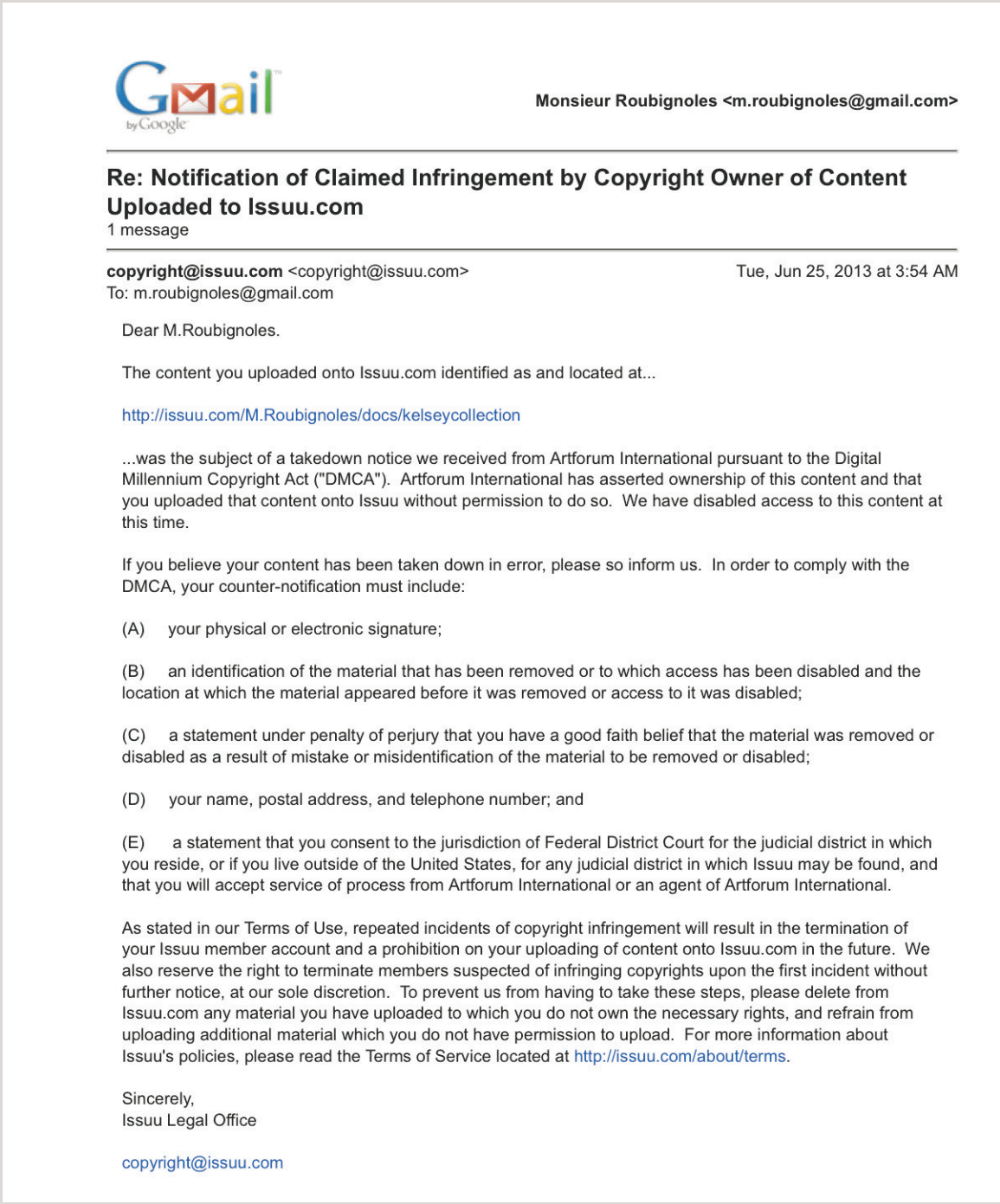
22.

Within the present moment, the artist’s personality emerges as a brand. Eclipsing the styles of exhibition, artworks are pockmarked with fascinating rabbit holes of personality. Abramovic’s stint at the MOMA testifies to this: her very person hung up on the walls during the business day — although, undoubtedly her “off-hours” appearances at various cultural events garner greater exhibition value.

*Out one Sunday night, you discover the whorehouse you attended has been replaced with a bar, and the prostitutes traded for barmaids. Mark my words — commerce changed, and the new sign of value will be the bottomless spiritual pit!*

23.

It is not a particular medium or manner that is of interest to the galleries, but rather a personality, a view of the artistic gesture, of its situation in society;



Addendum

When backed into a corner, the personality will utilize various tactics in order to fortify the means by which its reputation circulates. Its defense mechanisms can solicit a gamut of resources in which it has influence. These areas can include, but are certainly not limited to, its legal institutional leverage or even the grassroots social milieus to which it extends the promise of either fame or infamy.

The former maneuvering has most recently emerged through the artist personality’s request for *Artforum* to defend the reputation of one of its contributors. Publisher Charles Guarino has taken time out of his undoubtedly busy schedule to mysteriously acquire the phone numbers and email addresses of both the alleged infringers and those suspected of having influence upon M. Roubignolles. Under the threat of invoking the mechanisms of state repression through the involvement of police and FBI on the laughable grounds of “child pornography,” “cyber harassment,” and “copyright infringement”, Mr. Guarino — while amusingly requesting for his phone call not to be divulged — reiterated that *Artforum* routinely collaborates with the state both in and outside the United States, chasing down copyright infringers in China, for example, dragging them before Chinese authorities. Mr. Guarino comically warns that *Artforum* is willing to do the same in this case if their intellectual property, brand, copyright, private corporate goods, and reputation of their contributors are not resolutely defended. Revealingly, one can here witness the precious nature of the personality’s reputation with even the slightest desecration. Its nature is the nature of private wealth rendered seductively public. How could one not resist to simply reach out and nudge?

These recent developments stand as a most astounding recourse for the *artist* personality in particular, an individual which prides himself on the semblance of disregard to intellectual property, and yet, at the drop of a hat, pleads with an art publication to engage in censorship. Of course *Artforum* has their own pathological justifications for these troubling efforts. Again to paraphrase Mr. Guarino, there is, apparently, a “right” and a “wrong” type of institutional critique, the former championed for its implicit barrenness. What an error M. Roubignolles has made! Daring to investigate the extent to which defamation yields a wealth of opportunity!

like figurines to the ventriloquist, desperate for the most manipulating voice-trick, that is, the best trough to feed from.

24.

The denial of the exceptionality of the artist by *the artist* is almost always a trope for conceding the reality of an already bloated market. Such a recourse veils itself in the most mundane of tasks such as preparing food or education. Ambitions for public esteem remain the implicit solicitude for the artist personality trafficking in appearances.

25.

Money, as the means of advertising, has the capacity for purchasing everything and is therefore the most desirable thing in the world. The *fame* of its quality is the omnipotence of its essence, its *celebrity*. Celebrity is the amplified double movement of universality and individuality, the exchange relation made independent of any particular exchanges. Celebrity is the independence of the appearance, the appearance that moves itself. Celebrity is the dominant form of social separation, society as separation. Celebrities exist to freely act out various styles of living and embody the inaccessible result of the total social labor by dramatizing its commodities magically projected above it as its goal.

26.

The genus of the personality, for which all individuality is cultivated, expresses a type that the individual must exhaust. The individual is the whole man, the man whose needs and desires extend to everything that exists. The generic is the actual substance of this individual, while the individual is the capacity of the generic. The great mass of diversity is reduced to the same general unit that is sustained in a particular form.

27.

The artist personality is fully capable of its own differentiation and exhibits each of its types as having equal access to the totality of consumption, a terrain wherein both happiness and anguish are commensurable elements of wealth to instantiate its caricature. Here, experience is replaced by the cliché, and thought substituted by the hashtag.

28.

The validation of the personality is attained through reputation. Just as money — as a means of circulation and beyond a given magnitude — becomes capital, reputation becomes the personality through its own expansion. The appearance of the individual circulates through the prism of reputation and realizes its ascendancy as the personality. A mimesis of the circuit of capital, the self-aggrandizement of the personality proceeds through the moments of being-for-another (commodity), being-for-itself (money), and finally attaining its claim to totality as being both for-another *and* for-itself (capital). P-R-P’. Reputation is the means by which the personality circulates.

29.

If properly cultivated, victimhood is the sheltered fortune of the successful personality. Financial straits, an abusive childhood, a devastating break-up, ethnic persecution, drug addiction, etc. — each offer a wealth of resources by which the personality ascends. The personal and professional life must maintain a structural relation wherein only the former can exhibit the tumultuous background, while the latter remains calm and collected. The professional life however gains its exchange-value through the traumatic experiences of the personal life, an enriching inventory of assets capable of becoming monetized. Male pattern baldness must only be implicitly recognized therein.

30.

*When asked why a personality was targeted, I remember the note: “You must make your knife sharp and you must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter.”*

Despite the frequently enunciated separation between character assassination, denounced as a crass overemphasis on the personifications of the economy, and the structural criticisms of the economy itself, the phenomena of the personality demonstrates the supersession of the divide between the public and private self. There is no disparity between character assassination and the critique of political economy.

31.

Caricature is the loss of character, the stunted development of the individual, integrated in its disintegration, as the elevated imprint of the wrong life lived.

32.

Since reputation presumes the democratic nature of exchange, wherein *everyone* can gossip, the critique of personality, wherein the consistent sense of the non-identical confronts the untruth of the identity, cannot simply be a matter of wresting away control of the reputation, but rather by impregnating the reputation with associations which undermine itself and the specificities of its own circulation. It must deteriorate from *within*, rather than employ efforts to make the personality less popular. It must erode while nourishing, a dagger which is also a homage. Exploring the extent to which there is no such thing as bad publicity through the most exhaustive of measures can yield an abundant treasure if pursued strategically. The critique of the personality must mimic the proliferation of a *plague*.



Paris 19 July 2013

Dear Jeff,

Following on the heels of our conversation, concerning John Kelsey — thank you again for that exquisite dinner at your home and the stroll through Montmartre, I have always preferred le Droite — as usual our interludes birth a wealth to consider. In the course of our talk you revealed that you were familiar with Kelsey from the late 90's, but wondered why anyone would bother to launch a public attack, especially now that the artist's personality is old hat. And when we delved into *The Kelsey Collection Artforum 2004-2012* you expressed difficulty approaching the material due to feeling it crossed over to something... *too personal*... if I may interrupt, forestalling an accusation about my intentions, and quote a long dead Prussian politician, "Neid und Gier, das is mein Bier." Which, as far as I've been able to make out, means, "Envy and greed — that's my beer."

Regrettably, I do not know John Kelsey personally, nor am I intimate with his art, curations, nor writing — let alone do I think that any time soon we'll sing a Trinkduett. My limited exposure came just last summer on a remote Greek island in the Ionian Sea. Where for a few weeks I'd dwindle my daily bread in baths of salt water and sun, while at night, isolated, I'd read philosophy, fiction, and history. You see, the city center was empty at peak tourist season, which broadly diminished my capacity to go out and socialize. It was there I came across a copy of "Welcome to the Tate Café," a conversation between Merlin Carpenter, Emily Sundblad and John Kelsey. The dialogue, staged March 2012, is mostly a drawn out family affair, climaxing when angsty-teen Carpenter blows-up over the apparently non-consensual appropriation of one of his paintings for an exhibition. An act perpetrated by Reena Spaulings (Sundblad and Kelsey's collective, gallery, etc.). I'll include the money shot:

MC: Yeah. It's like rape. You are saying no, and then the no is a kind of yes.

JK: But there is always rape in art. We used to talk about being art-raped by our friends all the time.

ES: It's a fine line, or not even, but sometimes it's OK and sometimes it isn't. If we had just refused to admit that we copied you, if we hadn't said, 'oh my god, Merlin, we're so sorry', if we had just said, 'what are you talking about, you didn't make those paintings'...

MC: If anyone else had ripped off my paintings, it would have been fine. It's not the disconnection, it's the connection.

On second thought, I realize this wasn't my first rendezvous with John. A couple years ago I was lent a copy of Michèle Bernstein's *All the King's Horses* which he translated. Impassively the book unfolds from the author's perspective, and the reader gets to glimpse intellectual Parisian cafe culture, the Situationist milieu, and even a ménage à trois with a

young girl. I remember at the time considering how it placed Kelsey in *le contexte juste* (auf Deutsch: Kontext Kunst). Published by Semiotext(e), John Kelsey's name placed squarely on the cover, just below Guy Debord's first wife. General Patton, the liberator, it seemed had arrived to the prom, fashionably late, with the right date making a show of his silver jacket.

In long-suffering tone (clearly in anguish over the fresh defeat of May 68), Kelsey's introduction to the book drifts through a post 9/11 New York art world. Heroically finishing with a call to employ the *jeun-fille*, image of our very condition, against itself. He no doubt has been a success in his enterprise. And it is with the utmost sincerity that I undertook to continue his effort by accommodating an appeal for the elaboration of "future games."

Some readymade taboos were utilized in assembling this collection. From the impressions I have been able to cobble together of John, he seems to have built a reputation on following in the prematurely vacated shoes of Colin de Land, with a twist of transgressive chic. Always careful to stop short of saying or expressing tawdriness, he avails himself with themes of coy perpetual adolescence.

I won't lie, I lavished many delectable hours collecting every piece of writing Kelsey did for *Artforum*, and with my effete meathooks scanned, saved and toiled with TIFF files. I replaced the original illustrations by matching like colors, motifs and overall visual structures. When it was all done I felt certain I'd stayed true to the lascivious platitudes of contemporary art.

It would be naive to pretend that internet porn doesn't excite. By its nature shocking and repulsive, especially in the scenario where one's gripped with the unrelenting terror to produce something current for FB, Twitter, Tumblr or merely writing the newest article—when suddenly, interrupting the flow, a Vendôme column flashes onto the field of vision only to be subsumed by the Commune's indelible vacuity.

Alien from the homey quarters of the erotic, pornography, in the shadow of the public, functions by molesting its viewer from the side, unbuckling the clasp, and sucking him off while he's pondering ownership. Eyes glued to the narrative he barely looks down as a nervous finger socratizes the deeper privations of the colon.

It could be this is just a collection of johnny-come-lately appropriation art à la Richard Prince mixed with some purple prose. Or perhaps the document, *too personal* in approach, teems with illegitimacy; apropos *Good fences make good neighbors*. Indicative that moderate distances are no longer suitable bulwark against the production of the social.

Jeff, if you happen to see John, cause people sometimes do, would you tell him we'd like it if he'd come out from under that false humility and be the fabulous star and spectator of her own story?

Yours,

M. B.

Monsieur Roubignoles presents  
The Kelsey Collection Artforum 2004-2012



[johnkelseycollection.com](http://johnkelseycollection.com)

[http://monoskop.org/File:Kelsey\\_Collection.pdf](http://monoskop.org/File:Kelsey_Collection.pdf)

<http://document.li/J3BR>

[http://www.share.az/english/sfnrf93svd4h/The\\_Kelsey\\_Collection\\_Artforum\\_2004-2012.pdf.html](http://www.share.az/english/sfnrf93svd4h/The_Kelsey_Collection_Artforum_2004-2012.pdf.html)

<http://filetrash.ru/390/>

Despite the persistent poor sportsmanship on Artforum's part the collection will remain available online.



<http://www.slideshare.net/jonnieSuicide/hypoxicdeathandtheexitbag>

<http://www.exitinternational.net/>

<http://www.finalexit.org/>



[bogplot.blogspot.com](http://bogplot.blogspot.com)